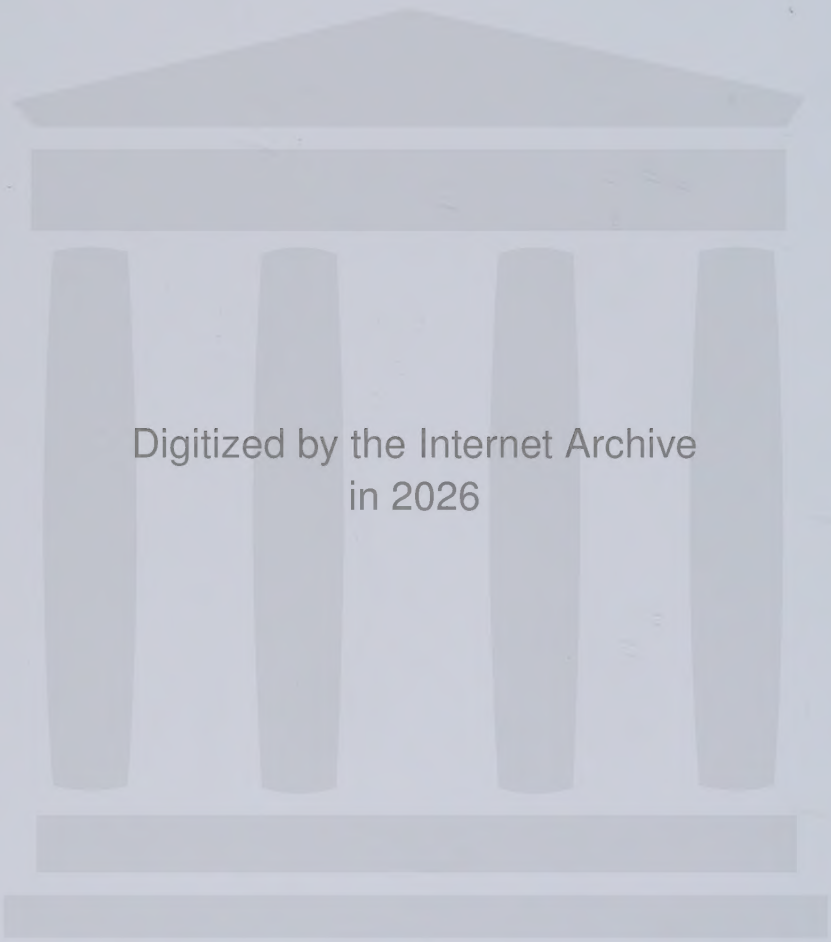
SEEKING THE COURAGE TO LIVE IN A DIVIDED WORLD

THIN PLACES

KIRKRIDGE FELLOWS STORIES
GATHERED BY
SALLY Z. HARE AND MEGAN LEBOUTILLIER

INSIGHTS FROM PARKER J. PALMER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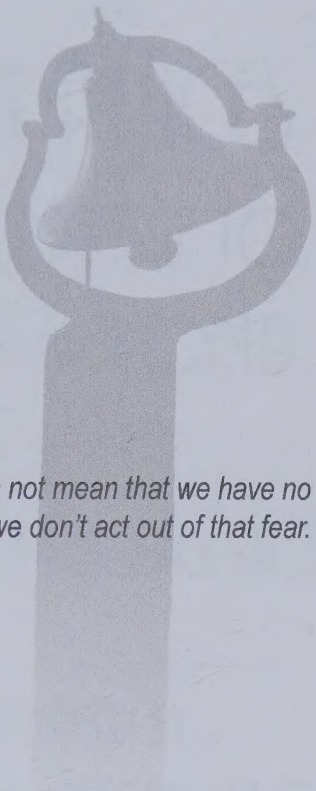

Courage does not mean that we have no fear,
but that we don't act out of that fear.

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ISBN: 978-0-9895042-6-3

Cover photos by Peter Richardson, a student at Juniata College majoring in photography and visual art. Peter grew up at Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and captured its beauty in this winter sunrise on the front and back cover.

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Prose Press
75 Red Maple Drive
Pawleys Island, South Carolina 29585
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DEDICATION

To Sharon Ellies Palmer,
the Godmother of Courage Work, with love and great gratitude
for the ways you hold Parker and all of us.

And to Parker J. Palmer,
our Founding Father, with love and great respect
for your courage and your wisdom and your generosity.

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BOOK OPENING

About Thin Places

Thin places have become, for me, a way of naming the space where I have the best chance of nurturing the courage to seek the undivided life I want to live. In a thin place, I see my connectedness to everything around me. I see the wholeness that is my birthright gift.

The idea of thin places goes back to the ancient Irish people, before the Celts arrived sometime after 500 BC, before Christianity came to Ireland. Researchers have uncovered signs and symbols of the beliefs that there was another world, a parallel world, and that thin places were the portals between the two worlds.

For that earliest Irish community, a thin place was an actual physical place. Over the next several thousand years, the definition of thin places expanded to include particular times of seasonal shifts, such as *Samhain*, the Celtic holiday when the boundaries between the material and spiritual worlds were transparent. Some thin places became known for their energy, rather than for being an opening between the worlds; people would go to these places to absorb their power.

Thin places were places of mystery, holy places that allowed humans to connect more easily to their spiritual selves. In thin places, we have easier access to Mahatma Gandhi's "indefinite mysterious power that pervades everything." In a thin place, we would have a better chance of seeing what Thomas Merton called a hidden wholeness in *Hagia Sophia:*

There is in all things an invisible fecundity,
a dimmed light,
a meek namelessness,
a hidden wholeness
This mysterious Unity, and Integrity, is Wisdom, the Mother of all, Natura naturans.

Harvard theologian Peter Gomes writes:

> *There is in Celtic mythology the notion of "thin places" in the universe where the visible and the invisible world come into their closest proximity. To seek such places is the vocation of the wise and the good — and for those that find them, the clearest communication between the temporal and eternal. Mountains and rivers are particularly favored as thin places marking invariably as they do, the horizontal and perpendicular frontiers. But perhaps the ultimate of these thin places in the human condition are the experiences people are likely to have as they encounter suffering, joy, and mystery.*

(http://www.onbeing.org/blog/thin-places-and-the-transforming-presence-of -beauty/6180)

The writers in this book have come to understand that thin places can be created with careful attention to safe and trustworthy space. These authors are all Kirkridge Courage Fellows, which, by prerequisite, means that they are facilitators prepared by the Center for Courage & Renewal (CCR). The Center was founded by Parker J. Palmer -- and what has come to be called Courage Work (it started as The Courage to Teach® – and over the past 20 years, is also The Courage to Lead® and Circles of Trust®) is grounded in Parker's writing and philosophy.

Throughout our book, thanks to Parker's generosity, you will find insights from his writing. He is a writer, teacher and activist who works independently on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality, and social change. In addition to being CCR Founder and Senior Facilitator, he has authored nine books, including *The Courage to Teach, Let Your Life Speak, A Hidden Wholeness,* and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. He holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley, and thirteen honorary doctorates. We begin here with Parker's insight on creating space from *A Hidden Wholeness* (p. 56):

- *We know how to create spaces that invite the intellect to show up, analyzing reality, parsing logic and arguing its case: such spaces can be found, for example, in universities.*
- *We know how to create spaces that invite the emotions into play, reacting to injury, expressing anger and celebrating joy: they can be found in therapy groups.*
- *We know how to create spaces that invite the will to emerge, consolidating energy and effort on behalf of a shared goal: they can be found in task forces and committees.*
- *We certainly know how to invite the ego to put in an appearance, polishing its image, protecting its turf and demanding its rights: they can be found wherever we go!*
- *But we know very little about creating spaces that invite the soul to make itself known. Apart from the natural world, such spaces are hard to find – and we seem to place little value on preserving the soul spaces in nature.*

So thin places are places where the soul can show up. The poet Mary Oliver says *"Nobody knows what the soul is"*; nevertheless, we share with you what we mean by the word in our glossary! We began the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program (KCFP) out of our yearning to create for ourselves that kind of space Parker writes about, the space we were committed to creating for others. We took to heart Parker's admonition that the natural world was the best place to begin – and we chose the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center for five retreats over two years from 2014-2016.

We wanted a Circle of Trust for ourselves, a space where we might go deeper into our own inner journeys—and also a low-risk space for practicing new ways to bring our inner work into the outer world. As you read Parker's words about The Movement Way in Section 1, you'll get a sense of our path. This book represents, for us, the step of going public. After all, we are the ones who have been facilitating this Courage Work, who have embedded the principles and practices (the Stepping Stone in the third section) into our lives.

Now we want to share our stories with you. We do so because of our belief in this idea from Frederick Buechner:

> *My story is important not because it is mine...but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is yours.*

We hope you'll find some of your own story in our stories, that you will find portals to your own thin places.

-- Sally Z. Hare

February, 2017

SECTION 1

Seeking the Courage to Let Our Lives Speak

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.

Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.

--Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

Insight from Parker J. Palmer

The Movement Way

I often say that if my ideas never left the pages of my books, they wouldn't be of much use. I celebrate the people who put wheels on those ideas, who find ways to live with integrity, to take their inner work into the outer world.

The Writers in this book have done just that. They share individual stories of deciding to live divided no more and then committing to creating that space for others, by becoming facilitators of the programs of the Center for Courage & Renewal (CCR): The Courage to Teach, The Courage to Lead, Circles of Trust. Their stories offer real-life examples of the CCR mission to create a more just, compassionate and healthy world by nurturing personal and professional integrity and the courage to act on it.

I offer this look at the way of the movement, as a way to gain insight into what sustained them as they took the journey to the undivided life. I began to understand movements when I saw the simple fact that nothing would ever have changed if reformers had allowed themselves to be done in by organizational resistance. Many of us experience such resistance as checkmate to our hopes for change. But for a movement, resistance is merely the place where things begin. The movement mentality, far from being defeated by organizational resistance, takes energy from opposition. Opposition validates the audacious idea that change must come.

The black liberation movement and the women's movement would have died aborning if racist and sexist organizations had been allowed to define the rules of engagement. But for some blacks, and for some women, that resistance affirmed and energized the struggle. In both movements, advocates of change found sources of countervailing power outside of organizational structures, and they nurtured that power in ways that eventually gave them leverage over organizations.

The genius of movements is paradoxical: They abandon the logic of organizations in order to gather the power necessary to rewrite the logic of organizations. Both the black movement and the women's movement grew outside of organizational boundaries--but both returned to change the lay, and the law, of the land.

How does a movement unfold and progress? I see four definable stages in the movements I have studied—stages that do not unfold as neatly as this list suggests, but often overlap and circle back on each other:

- Isolated individuals decide to stop leading "divided lives."
- These people discover each other and form groups for mutual support.
- Empowered by community, they take the risk to "go public."
- Alternative rewards emerge to sustain the movement's vision, which may force the conventional reward system to change.

STAGE ONE: Choosing Integrity

The first stage in a movement can be described with some precision, I think. It happens when isolated individuals make an inner choice to stop leading "divided lives." Most of us know from experience what a divided life is. Inwardly we feel one sort of imperative for our lives, but outwardly we respond to quite another. This is the human condition, of course; our inner and outer worlds will never be in perfect harmony. But there are extremes of dividedness that become intolerable, and when the tension snaps inside of this person, then that person, and then another, a movement may be underway.

The decision to stop leading a divided life, made by enough people over a period of time, may eventually have political impact. But at the outset, it is a deeply personal decision, taken for the sake of personal integrity and wholeness. I call it the "Rosa Parks decision" in honor of the woman who decided, one hot Alabama day in 1955, that she finally would sit at the front of the bus.

Rosa Parks' decision was neither random nor taken in isolation. She served as secretary for the local NAACP, had studied social change at the Highlander Folk School, and was aware of others' hopes to organize a bus boycott. But her motive that day in Montgomery was not to spark the modern civil rights movement. Years later, she explained her decision with a simple but powerful image of personal wholeness: "I sat down because my feet were tired."

I suspect we can say even more: Rosa Parks sat at the front of the bus because her soul was tired of the vast, demoralizing gap between knowing herself as fully human and collaborating with a system that denied her humanity. The decision to stop leading a divided life is less a strategy for altering other people's values than an uprising of the elemental need for one's own values to come to the fore. The power of a movement lies less in attacking some enemy's untruth than in naming and claiming a truth of one's own.

There is immense energy for change in such inward decisions as they leap from one person to another and outward to the society. With these decisions, individuals may set in motion a process that creates change from the inside out. There is an irony here: We often think of movements as "confrontational," as hammering away at social structures until the sinners inside repent and we contrast them (often invidiously) with the "slow, steady, faithful" process of working for change from within the organization. In truth, people who take an organizational approach to problems often become obsessed with their unyielding "enemies," while people who adopt a movement approach must begin by changing themselves. These people have seized the personal insight from which all movements begin: No punishment can possibly be more severe than the punishment that comes from conspiring in the denial of one's own integrity.

STAGE TWO: Communities of Encouragement and Support

But the personal decision to stop leading a divided life is a frail reed. All around us, dividedness is presented as the sensible, even responsible, way to live. So the second stage in a movement happens when people who have been making these decisions start to discover each other and enter into relations of mutual encouragement and support. These groups, which are characteristic of every movement I know about, perform the crucial function of helping the Rosa Parkses of the world know that even though they are out of step, they are not crazy. Together we learn that behaving normally is sometimes nuts but seeking integrity is always sane. But it is clear from all great movements that mutual support is vital if the inner decision is to be sustained and if the movement is to take its next crucial steps toward gathering power.

STAGE THREE: Going Public

The third stage of a movement has already been implied. As support groups develop, individuals learn to translate their private concerns into public issues, and they grow in their ability to give voice to these issues in public and compelling ways. To put it more precisely, support groups help people discover that their problems are not "private" at all but have been occasioned by public conditions and therefore require public remedies.

This has been the story of the women's movement (and of the black liberation movement as well). For a long time, women were "kept in their place" partly by a psychology that relegated the pain women felt to the private realm - grist for the therapeutic mill. But when women came together and began discovering the prevalence of their pain, they also began discerning its public roots. Then they moved from Freud to feminism.

The translation of private pain into public issues that occurs in support groups goes far beyond the analysis of issues; it also empowers people to take those issues into public places. It was in small groups (notably, in churches) that blacks were empowered to take their protest to the larger community in songs and sermons and speeches, in pickets and in marches, in open letters and essays and books. Group support encourages people to risk the public exposure of insights that had earlier seemed far too fragile for that rough-and-tumble realm.

I am using the word "public" here in a way that is more classical than contemporary. The public realm I have in mind is not the realm of politics, which would return us to the manipulation of organizational power. Instead, to "go public" is to enter one's convictions into the mix of communal discourse. It is to project one's ideas so that others can hear them, respond to them, and be influenced by them and so that one's ideas can be tested and refined in the public crucible. The public, understood as a vehicle of discourse, is pre-political. It is that primitive process

of communal conversation, conflict, and consensus on which the health of institutionalized power depends.

The Writers in this book are taking a step towards going public by sharing their stories. Because this activity does not always have direct political impact, some skeptics may call it "mere words." But this criticism comes from an organizational mentality. By giving public voice to our stories, by naming and claiming alternative values, we can create something more fundamental than political change. We can create cultural change.

STAGE FOUR: Alternative Rewards

As a movement passes through the first three stages, it develops ways of rewarding people for sustaining the movement itself. In part, these rewards are simply integral to the nature of each stage; they are the rewards that come from living one's values, from belonging to a community, from finding a public voice. But in stage four, a more systematic pattern of alternative rewards emerges, and with it comes the capacity to challenge the dominance of existing organizations.

The power of organizations depends on their ability to reward people who abide by their norms, even the people who suffer from those norms. A racist society depends on a majority who are rewarded for keeping the minority "in its place" and on a minority willing to stay there. But as members of either group discover rewards for alternative behavior, it becomes more difficult for racism to reign. An educational system that ignores human need in favor of a narrow version of professionalism depends on a reward system that keeps both faculty and students in their place. But as soon as rewards for alternative behavior emerge for either group, it becomes more difficult for reform to be denied its day.

What are the alternative rewards offered by a growing movement? As a movement grows, the meaning one does not find in conventional work is found in the meaning of the movement. As a movement grows, the affirmation one does not receive from organizational colleagues is received from movement friends. As a movement grows, careers that no longer satisfy may be revisioned in forms and images that the movement has inspired. As a movement grows, the paid work one cannot find in conventional organizations may be found in the movement itself.

In stage one, people who decide to live "divided no more" find the courage to face punishment by realizing that there is no punishment worse than conspiring in a denial

of one's own integrity. That axiom, inverted, shows how alternative rewards can create cracks in the conventional reward system and then grow in the cracks: People start realizing there is no reward greater than living in a way that honors one's own integrity. Taken together, the two axioms trace a powerful vector of a movement's growth from rejecting conventional punishments to embracing alternative rewards.

These alternative rewards may seem frail and vulnerable when compared to the raises and promotions organizations are able to bestow upon their loyalists. So they are. Integrity, as the cynics say, does not put bread on the table. But people who are drawn into a movement generally find that stockpiling bread is not the main issue for them. They have the bread they need and, given that, they learn the wisdom of another saying: "People do not live on bread alone." We live, ultimately, on our integrity.

UNDERSTANDING THE MOVEMENT WAY

By understanding the stages of a movement, I hope we may see more clearly that many of us are engaged in a movement today, that we hold in our hands a form of power that has driven real change in recent times. At every stage of a movement there is both power to help change happen and encouragement for disheartened souls. Wherever we are on this journey, a step taken to renew our spirits may turn out to be a step towards wholeness, towards integrity—once we understand the movement way.

Parker J. Palmer is a writer, teacher, and activist who works independently on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality, and social change. Founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal, he has authored nine books, including *The Courage to Teach, Let Your Life Speak, A Hidden Wholeness,* and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. He holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley, and thirteen honorary doctorates.

MEETING THE AUTHORS

Janet Files: I feel most alive when I am fully present to the beauty in each moment and when I am part of a vibrant community, discovering and sharing stories of personal significance. I also feel very alive sitting on my back porch in the freshness of morning, enjoying bird songs, coffee, a good read and the delicious tonic of the sounds, smells and feels of the earth and my creatures great and small. And of course, I feel alive when enjoying the zany, warm company anywhere, anytime of the loving heap of my four grown children, my endearing, devoted husband Bill and any beloved friends who are caught up in the links of our loving relationships.

Dianne Baker: *I feel most alive singing in community; being in, on or under water: swimming, paddling or scuba diving; being among the trees; and sharing a meal and laughter with beloved family and friends. I think in song, rhythm and metaphor, fueled by an inventive spirit and quirky imagination. I am deeply in love with my family, and playing in the dirt, making beautiful things grow. Courage & Renewal work has brought out in me love, courage, and compassion and has reshaped my life and much of my approach to work.*

Caroline Fairless: Baseball is my passion, and had I been born a boy, I know I'd have played professional ball (for the Pirates). The banjo is my instrument of choice . . . if only I could play it. For several years I have apprenticed myself to a marble sculptor. After my beloved dog Missy died, I swore I would never have another dog. Now we have two. My book *The Dance of the Caterpillars ~ In a Time Before Texting* is my sweetest and most tender work. The beauty I love takes many forms, with one thread in common – that it takes me out of myself and out of time. I am in awe of the simple walk from our house to a nearby pond. It is pure magic when I can be on the water in a kayak. I love what emerges when I am still and patient; it might be a phrase on a page, or a purple finch at the feeder, or seeing what my hands can shape from a block of clay. I love to garden. I love the knowledge that as I care for the soil, I am making it richer. I love the smell of the seasons just prior to their appearance. I love New Hampshire and the beauty of our home.

Patti Smith: *I feel most alive when the wind, sun, raindrops or snow are touching my face as I walk, ski, or paddle on the water, in the woods, up mountains or along the shore, especially when I am with my most special buddy, my partner Rob. I am a smithy, forging bridges between cultures, religious beliefs, educational philosophies, and the difficult and formed aspects of myself. I wish I were a comedian because I believe laughter is the strongest bridge builder on earth.*

Sue E. Small: I have come to understand that my Work in the world is listening, supporting, and encouraging others and myself to engage in both formal and informal "circle of trust" experiences to hold those difficult conversations within as they listen to others. I am learning to live in the world as well as "to be of use" in it. I am still learning and becoming a Courage & Renewal facilitator as I live the questions within the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship.

Sandra Sturdivant Merriam: *Please call me Sandie. From the time I was in the second grade I have had a love affair with the natural world. I enjoy bird watching, walking my Labradoodle Millie on the beach, and spending time with my family. My Work in the world is fostering hope in those who serve our children, encouraging their voices, creating spaces where they might find their own hopeful voices. I am energized by ideas, paradox, and finding a way forward against great odds, to pay it forward… I learned that from my mother. I am grateful to be a Courage & Renewal facilitator and am passionate about sharing the principles and practice of this approach to living.*

Mardi Tindal: I feel most alive when I am facilitating, cycling along water and hiking wooded trails, baking for those I love, and playing with my granddaughter. My Work in the world is finding hope, sharing it with others, and helping them discover hope, too. Community is core for me: my family, my nascent co-housing community, my community of faith, my Canadian and international communities, including the Kirkridge community. I have been a Courage & Renewal facilitator for about 10 years.

Phoenix Rising: A Season of Loss and Transformation

By Janet Files

There are 44 million minutes in a well-lived life. In three minutes of that collected time, energy, and accumulated material and relational worth, the meaning I had made from those millions of moments crystallized and burst into flame, like a magnifying glass focusing light on dry tinder.

September 26, 2014 was a perfect late afternoon in Myrtle Beach. The sky was blue, and the humidity and temperature so inviting that my friend, Cherie, and I had our 4:00 yoga practice on my back deck. We joked about how we were able to have a deep, restorative savasana in spite of the knocking and clanking of the attic fan above our heads. "I will have to get my husband, Bill, to look at that later as it will keep my friend awake who is staying in the room right under that fan."

It was a warning, but one we had no way to interpret. Yet.

A half-hour later I was enjoying chopping cilantro to add to the mango salsa. Savoring the blended fragrance of the lime, mango and cilantro, I imagined it being the perfect counterpoint for the fresh Murrells Inlet hogfish we would enjoy on the deck for dinner when the smoke alarm interrupted my musings. I put down my knife and followed the sound upstairs to the guest and library wing, wondering what could have set off this false alarm. My smoke alarms had always been false.

As I rounded the top of the stairs, I saw white smoke curling along the ceiling. One second and my body registered full fight or flight—trying its best to help me respond to what was no longer a relaxing evening. My mind was still telling me, "This has to be a mistake!" I ran into the room emitting the smoke. Fire was dropping through the attic air duct onto the floor next to 40 years of collected children's and adult literature. Fahrenheit 451 had been reached!

My body was propelled down the stairs at a freakishly fast pace as all within me cried out to "DO SOMETHING BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!!" Somewhat confused, my mind told me to grab that trusty fire fighting tool, the handy dishtowel, run back and "save the house" from the invader. After a few powerful but pitifully inadequate swipes at the licking flames, the smoke turning oily and black, my mind finally registered, "Get out now! This is the way people die in house fires!"

I did an about face, slamming the door behind me and any other door I passed through. I grabbed our precious dog Gordito, my phone, and the car keys, and ran out the door. Now all mental, emotional, physical and spiritual systems seamlessly meshed to help me with the real task ahead. What really matters? What is worth saving?

I put my dog in the car and drove it out of the way of potential fire-fighting trucks as I called 911. I tried not to shout..."***YES, I see flames. YES, all animals and people are out of the house. YES, pleeease HURRY***." I didn't learn until later that a house fire doubles in size every 30 seconds. By this time my journals, books and photos were already getting crispy around the edges.

Next call to husband of 37 years: "Our house is on fire."

"Ok, that's not funny."

"No-o-o, it's true. Flames coming out the back window. The real deal!! Do you want me to try to save anything? I have Gordi."

"No, no, there is nothing I want. DON'T GO BACK IN THERE!!"

I could see that the fire had not made it to the other side of the house, or down the stairs, so I ran into the fire-free side and grabbed my computer and a precious handmade brass box the size of a thimble that held a memento of deep spiritual significance to our family and gave the rest to God. Waiting the ten minutes for the fire truck, attempting patience in the midst of heart-racing panic, I struggled to maintain some kind of even breathing while every cell in my body was reaching out to urge those missing firemen with their cooling, water gushing hoses and ladders to HURRY!

My neighbor, Rob, came over carrying a glass of cabernet, and we walked to the back of the house where flames were now licking the siding, reaching out the upstairs window, charring the surrounding walls and illuminating the attic ceiling. My mouth

was too dry to take in more than a sip of wine—but I was deeply comforted by his gesture and found relief in sharing some gallows humor and telling the story for the first time of my fiery surprise at the top of the stairs.

We hurried back to the front of the house as we heard the sweet sound of the very efficient and professional North Myrtle Beach Fire Department fire engine now closing in on our address. Jason was the first to find me. "So glad you are HERE!" I tried not to shout or throw myself in his arms. "The fire is upstairs in the back room!!"

Jason calmly and decisively walked to the back of the house while I tried not to tell him how to do his job. A Minnie-Mouse version of my voice squeaked out, wanting him to see how urgent this was.

"I know, Ma'am," Jason said calmly. "I just have to make sure of what we are going into."

Of course, it was **his** life at stake. I told myself to step back and let the man do his job.

Finally, in what was probably only a few minutes, he and his buddy were in full gear with masks and helmets, dragging four-inch-diameter hoses into my house and up my stairs. I noticed they had little Batman and Robin action figures glued to the top front of their helmets.

"I guess you can't take the boy out of the man," I mused.

Later I learned that the plastic figure has a lower melting point than their helmets and facemasks, so if the figure melts, the partners would know the heat behind the wall they were breaking through was above 1000, and they would need to duck below the heat. Their Batman and Robin came out headless.

More firemen arrived, fire and water restoration reps arrived with their business cards, along with a crowd of other firetruck chasers. Friends arrived and husband, Bill, arrived with bottles of wine and glasses. I reached for him and he for me and we embraced, sharing an understanding that was beyond words.

My friend, Horst, sat in the car with Gordi, our dog who chants Om with our yoga class and loves everyone. Horst wanted to make sure Gordi was not scared, and he knew we had our attention on other things.

We all stood in my front yard watching the coordinated force of firemen rushing into my house with fire hoses, chainsaws and tarps. (Yes, they are so thoughtful they try to cover the downstairs furniture to save it from all the water!)

The young fellow carrying the chainsaw paused and said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I have to cut a hole in your floor to let the water out."

"Of course, do what you have to do!" My heart responded to yet another large act of kindness and civility in the midst of the chaos.

They were blasting water at the now-flaming collection of over 2000 volumes of children's books, many of them signed; my son's framed lithographs; my carefully filed and collected professional notes, notebooks, and videos from 40 years as an educator; and over 46 years of personal and travel journals neatly arranged by year. Strangely, I had already given it all up. In the wonderful clarity of how quickly the elements of air, fire, and water came together to transform my material possessions, I had a chance to let it go...or maybe to realize, it was never that important.

As I sipped wine with my husband and friends, we toasted our abundance in the midst of losses. I felt no anxiety over the material objects that were surely a charred sodden muddle, even as the next few days uncovered how much truly was lost, as well as the miracles of the art and treasures that were saved. (As we made our way through the fire damage three days after the fire, we discovered that all of my son's lithographs were safe, having been covered with sodden insulation when the fireman pulled down walls. One journal that recorded a priceless time and which I felt a pang over losing, oddly appeared in the middle of the floor in the charred room from whence it came.)

Where did this calm come from? I told my husband, Bill, a few mornings after the fire, that it was almost like being dead and having the chance to watch my life as if I were hovering above it and seeing it unfold as in a movie. I had a sense of detachment and objectivity that allowed for a deeper level of reflection.

There is deep wisdom captured best in St. Theresa of Avila's prayer: Let nothing disturb you, let nothing affright you. All things are passing, God never changeth. Moments like these—events like a fire or disaster propelling instant change-- are crucibles for the lesson in that prayer. Lessons for living in the sense that all those "things"--even precious books -- take time and our valuable "life units" of energy in multiple ways. Time to know what books to order—that is delight—one push of the Amazon-buy-with-one-click button and they arrive on my doorstep. Time to read and savor those books--also a delight—and then find a place for them—which is no longer easy in my house, full of burgeoning bookshelves often stuffed two or three books deep. Then, eventually, when needed downsizing arrives, time to decide what to do with all those thousands of volumes on wall-to-wall bookshelves. No longer a problem when, Poof! Solution given in a 30-minute house fire.

Immediately after the fire, friends asked me, "How are you staying so calm?" I suppose it could be that we have excellent insurance which paid for removing all debris, cleaning and restoring our material goods, and could even replace everything that was lost. That certainly helped --though my husband and I occasionally joke that if the fire had burned the entire house, we could have rebuilt a much simpler, much

smaller house and been free of all this abundance of space requires.

I was rather amazed at my attitude toward the losses. I spent a few hours wearing a gas mask and trying to rescue some of my favorite books by authors such as Cynthia Rylant, Jane Yolen, and that mysterious Chris Van Allsburg. A few favorites were put in boxes to try to clean for schools, and some to try to salvage for my personal dwindled collection, saved to read to future potential grandchildren. Dear friends and I sat for hours in my driveway, equipped with Q-tips, latex gloves, and paper towels soaked in alcohol, lovingly wiping and re-reading each rescued book to remove soot and smoke damage, enjoying our time together chatting and appreciating each unique treasure as well as the treasure of our company.

I took odd joy in the dumpster we had outside where we threw not only fire-damaged items but other unused and no longer useful items. (My husband and I long for one to be permanently installed to make excess removal an easy task.)

Where did this calm and detachment come from?

LIFE LESSONS FROM JENNY

I had some time to practice four months earlier when I helped my dearest friend of 44 years pass after a return of cancer. Jenny and I had been roommates in graduate school in Atlanta in the 70's, attended each other's weddings and helped each other through our divorces. She was the godmother of my four children and we spent every Christmas eve enjoying Jenny's childlike joy in giving all of us silly toys—light-up fingertips, impossibly huge chocolate bars, basketball hoops to wear on our heads and try to score, all after wine had been served. We celebrated each other's second and lasting marriages and made it a ritual to go out to birthday lunches, even if we had to wait a month to celebrate; we never missed one.

Before Jenny was released from the hospital, friends cleaned her house where she had stashes of gifts for others and quirky items stacked in the room where her hospital bed would need to find a space. There we brought her home to spend her last days. We prayed with her, sang for her and helped her let go of each of us and her precious husband as we let go of her body. Along with other friends we created a celebration of her life, and friends from near and far crowded our large house and waited for room to view the slide show pictures of Jenny, showing her with those people and places she loved--always with her signature smile, often accompanied by a startling life affirming laugh.

Months after she passed, I asked her husband if he had any of her jewelry left that I had given her over the years, thinking her two god-daughters might like a token. He had given it all to charity. It was easy to let that go, too. It is really just "stuff" that is amusing and often pretty to look at in the moment but in the end, it is just stuff. Jenny

helped me know that nothing of value is ever lost. I have her with me whenever I remember her.

Seeing what really mattered to Jenny as we created her memorial and seeing what really mattered in our relationship must have helped me be ready for the sense of calm after the fire. It could be that age-old wisdom finally burned through all the attachment to stuff and clarified my ability to see that this oddly packaged fiery "gift of God" will free up my time and clear up my own clutter so I can spend more of my life units on the Beauty I love. My job then is to discern and pay attention to what that is.

Where does the calm come from? It could be that the work I have been doing with my life for the last twenty years, consciously allowing myself to attend and to host Circle of Trust retreats set me up to pay attention to what it means to continue to seek joy –to be present to what matters in my life and to spend time on what matters. It is not a goal; it is a practice that is never ending.

THE PHOENIX

A month before the fire I made a trip to New York City to help my daughter, Margaret, move into her new apartment near Morningside Park. We visited the Cathedral of St. John the Divine to see the installation of the six-ton sculpture of the Phoenix by artist, Xu Bing. He created this magnum opus from trash and debris from the construction sites across the rapidly changing urban landscape of Beijing. The monstrous structure hung as if suspended from the thousands of points of light the artist used to outline and illuminate the Phoenix as it rose into the dark-vaulted ceiling over the main cathedral floor. The Phoenix has always been one of my favorite mythological symbols of rebirth and the strength and beauty that rises from seeming destruction.

Kabir told us, "If you have not lived through something, it is not true." The truth of the Phoenix that has risen from the fire and from my life can be glimpsed in small "phoenix" moments I take time in this writing to contemplate. The growing sense of moving toward an undivided life where I return consciously or unconsciously to the question, "What is the action, the thought, the attitude most in line with my inner knowing and the truth my life has revealed to me about taking joy?" You always have a choice—to turn to the ashes or toward the phoenix that rises and is suspended and illumined by infinite points of light.

Four months after the fire I called my 97-year-old father as I always did the morning we were scheduled to pick him up for our weekly Sunday dinner. There was no answer after three tries. We found that he had passed peacefully, like the gentleman he always was, fully dressed with shoes on ready and waiting to go to dinner. We took time to celebrate his life in all the communities he and I touched. My four children left their busy lives and flew in from California and New York and North Carolina to savor and celebrate their grandfather, adding their full participation in his life's celebration.

They each took what they might need or want to remember him. My son, William, wanted his deer-antler pocketknife, Mikey his carefully organized tool bench that he used to repair and build personal mundane treasures for each of us, Margaret took the teacups and etched wine glasses, Daniel made careful selections from his extensive vinyl music albums. It was easy to call Goodwill and Caring Transitions and let them find a use for the rest. I kept his sextant, which he used to navigate by the stars.

Yesterday, calculating mileage for my state job, my worst math word problem ever, I needed a beauty break so I walked up to re-shelve some children's picture books. Touching my old friends, including Cynthia Rylant's *Scarecrow* and Jane Yolen's *Owl Moon,* I noticed my hands were dusted lightly with soot. These beloved book friends were among those that lived through the fire. I imaginatively leapt forward to the stories I would tell my future grandchildren when their fingers came away with a little smudge.

It came to me that this is a defining story that we will tell over and over in our family... A story of survival and wholeness.

Maybe if we see our life story as an allegory—the real meaning hidden in plain sight between the lines—and don't take our own life too literally or too seriously, it will reveal the overwhelming love and light that shine through even the moments that seem darkest. I choose to craft my life around the phoenix and not the ashes.

Author's Note: Life units is a concept I use to think of the amount of physical, mental and emotional energy it takes to do any act. It often helps me make a more mindful choice. I first heard the term when I was working with a mediator to help resolve a legal dispute. In trying to settle the case, the mediator explained that we could try to gain more material restitution over time, but should consider not just the money, but also the number of life units it would take. We might end up with more in terms of financial gain, but did we want to spend the time and energy to be involved with this person and the negative situation over an extended period of time? How many life units would that involve? We don't often think of the time and energy something takes but rather in terms of monetary value, when in reality what is more important is time and how you choose to use it.

Dr. Janet Files has facilitated retreats and workshops that combine Courage principles and writing for a variety of audiences including teachers, hospice workers, and the Franciscan Sisters of Mercy. What travels with her from her Courage facilitator role enlivens the work Janet does for the SC Department of Education with literacy coaches and teachers. She facilitates Circle of Trust retreats using writing as a practice to deepen inner knowing and with her colleague, Dr. Sara Sanders, has written the book, *Writing Along the Möbius Strip: A Practice to Set the Heart at Rest.* She would like to hear from you and welcomes any writing you are willing to share (janet.files@gmail.com)

A Tale of Two Watches

By Dianne Baker

They tell the best of time, they tell the worst of time!

I own two analog wristwatches that each has rather unique properties, making them far more than simple timepieces. Each watch causes me to pause and reflect, and to open my heart and mind to how I mark time and to the choices I have with the moments, hours, and days that make up my life. One watch is special because of its deliberate design; one I treasure because of an accidental flaw which has come to be a wonderful gift! Let me tell the tale of these two accessories, and the ways they cause me to reflect, with the urgings of the timeless poet, Mary Oliver, on what I plan to do with my "one wild and precious life."

In August of 2009, I traveled with two women friends to the YMCA of the Rockies to attend a five-day Mindfulness Meditation Retreat, which was to have been led by the venerable Vietnamese Buddhist monk and author, Thich Nhat Hanh. At the first gathering of nearly 1200 eager beings, we were told by one of the nuns that Thay (an affectionate name meaning teacher in Vietnamese) was in the hospital in Philadelphia and would not be able to join us for the retreat. The leadership of the event was to

be offered by monks and nuns who had been with Thich Nhat Hanh for years and would be an opportunity for all of us to practice "non-attachment" and letting go of expectations. We were to experience the "continuation of Thay" through their sharing of the Dharma talks and meditation leadership.

In that moment, time stood still. I was really only in attendance because I longed to experience this great master in person; to have the physical experience of being at the feet of someone humble, great, wise and "famous." Another of my traveling friends was also very disappointed. The retreatants were offered that they could have their fees refunded, if they wished to leave. Having driven from Winnipeg in Manitoba for over 20 hours, none of our small cohort intended to depart. So each of us went within our own hearts to "come into the present moment" and simply accept this new now, to enter with freshness and beginner's mind.

The retreat was glorious, powerful, moving, and intimate! Can I call it intimate when there were over 1100 people there? Yes! The silence and the loving regard shared in walking past one another, the intention of creating peace together, felt intimate. I hoped to bring some tangible reminders of the sense of presence and peace into my own life. In the retreat's bookshop, alongside posters, cards and mindfulness bells, I found a watch. The minute hand had the word "It's" written on it, and instead of numerals to mark 3, 6, 9 and 12, was the word "NOW" written in Thay's calligraphy. Thich Naht Hanh's puckish humor had been applied to the development of this watch, so that when anyone asks the wearer what time it is, the person can reply "It's NOW"!

In the spring of 2009, I read *Let Your Life Speak* for the first time. I was deeply moved by Parker J. Palmer's words. I was especially touched by Parker's reflections on depression, as "the noonday demon" has been my own traveling companion in life. I recognized my own inner journey in his words: *"I NOW know myself to be a person of weakness and strength, liability and giftedness, darkness and light. I know that to be whole means to reject none of it but to embrace all of it."* The lessons from a mindfulness meditation practice remind me to value the present moment and to relieve myself from the judgment of comparing myself to others, from living in the anxious place of tomorrow's worry and the acidic rumination of yesterday's errors.

The value of listening to my LIFE and to my moments, supported by mindfulness meditation, brought me to a great appreciation of awareness of "Now," not as imperative or demand, but as presence. This was part of what fueled my interest in attending the meditation retreat in Colorado. As I read more of Parker J. Palmer's work, I began to unearth a sincere longing for community that lived an awareness of integrity, authenticity and presence, in service of the soul's truth and in the value of live encounters with other beings, with our earth and to build sustainable, loving

relationships. I have had moments of this reality in some church experiences of both worship and of justice work, and I knew that it must be possible to nurture this way in more eclectic settings.

I sought out a retreat close enough to drive to (Minneapolis) and began to explore what Circles of Trust meant in "real time." Reading *A Hidden Wholeness* convinced me that skilled leadership, strong boundary markers (group guidelines), evocative questions and generous silence would offer safety and beauty that made shy and tender souls ready to emerge and be heard into speech. This first retreat experience, in a lovely center surrounded by beauty, and with ample time to touch the earth and listen to my heart, felt like a taste of home. I returned to my community and my workplace nourished, renewed, aware of a new community of seekers, and eager to learn more. By the end of 2011, I had begun my journey toward Courage & Renewal facilitation. I lived the experience of embracing the rightness of time, *kairos*, while attending to the marking of days and hours, *chronos*.

When I live knowing "It's NOW," and when I lead from that space as a facilitator, I honor the Courage & Renewal touchstones which support safe community in Circles of Trust, and I won't risk falling into fixing or saving. I commit to "being present as fully as possible," to deep listening that makes space for others to speak their truth. I can enjoy the silence and hold the space for silence, knowing that each participant is capable of receiving what he or she needs from the space, in "the now" we embrace together in these retreats.

My mindfulness watch reminds me of the joy-filled choice to be open-hearted, to welcome surprise and wonder and to trust the inner teacher in me and in others. Courage & Renewal work has opened my heart and mind to the great value of setting apart time to nourish my soul so that my work in the world has compassion, and authenticity. As a participant, I always find that having this retreat from the regular patterns of busy-ness and engagement allows me to drop down into a trusting space of rest, reflection, listening to my inner teacher, hearing the work of integrity engaged by the souls gathered together. There is a special quality of timelessness and spaciousness that pervades a well-designed retreat. Even when, as a facilitator, I need to be aware of the timing around the arc of a retreat, navigating shared leadership and mealtimes, and the group's need for silence, I still find a sense of ease in letting time flow within the boundaries of a good plan. Freedom in the structure, openness within well-defined boundaries: these are some of the paradoxes that hold space well for the soul's work.

My other watch which I want to introduce you to offers me a playful metaphor for the power of retreat. This other watch looks like a run of the mill timepiece; a silver body

and linked bracelet, a white face with gold accents and numbers. In my line of work, I need a simple watch to track the length of my appointment sessions with clients, one that I can read with ease with a simple glance down at my wrist. I have never liked big clunky watches with multiple functions. I just want to be able to read the time at a glance! I bought the least expensive, sturdiest, plainest watch I could find. I did not need this feature, but the watch has a calendar dial; you know, the kind that counts the days of the month, but doesn't indicate the month, and needs to be adjusted between months that end in 30 days and months that have 31 days (you have to pay special attention at the end of February). That amount of fiddling, I could handle.

I bought the watch in January, 2011, and got used to its weight and style. Every morning, I strapped it to my wrist, and carried on with my day. In the first week of February, I was writing a check at a fundraising event and didn't have my datebook with me, and I couldn't see a calendar on the wall in the room I was in. So, I checked my watch calendar for the first time, and saw, to my great puzzlement, that the date was the 35th! I blinked several times and looked again. Yup, 35! As I twisted the dial it counted up, 36, 37, 38, 39.... And then to my great delight, turned over to 00.

I realized that there must be a tooth on an inner cog missing on the calendar dial, surely a defect that might be worthy of getting a refund... and then I thought, "If it is January 35th, no one can find me! I am in an alternate dimension! How freeing!" I decided to keep the watch, embracing its quirk, and allowing myself to relish the oddity for a private giggle now and then.

In my facilitation, several times the dates have slipped across the threshold of a month, and my watch's peculiarity has been observed by me, and then shared, as a grace note, with the gathered group. For each of us, on retreat, we can choose to be in an "alternate dimension of time," in a space set apart from the everyday. We each can choose how deeply to embrace the silence and safety, and to allow the boundaries of the retreat space to extend to the edges of our awareness of the world beyond the edges of our circle. I see people on retreat who hold this space for themselves and others generously, and I see others who are battling with the frequent call of internet, email and messages from home or work. Technology allows us to be, at least digitally, in two places at once, and this seems a manifestation of the challenge to be fully present.

I like imagining that when I am on retreat I am in a separate reality, where time serves the group, rather than being the master of the process. In planning, spaciousness and flow and silence are as important as content. On the 37th of any given month, time expands without the pressure of performance, productivity or evaluation. On the

34th day of April, a live encounter with the land, the trees, and the heart of Rumi, or Wendell Berry, or Margaret Atwood or Chuang Tzu, is a time of alchemy and wonder when one's inner teacher can whisper without interruption.

In *A Hidden Wholeness* Parker writes with clarity and humor about "schedules that possess simple grace," schedules that honor three principles: slow down, do more with less, and pay attention to rhythm. My odd little wristwatch offers me a monthly reflection on being spacious with time, so that I may know a schedule with "simple grace."

I also love that it is the missing cog that has given life to this watch's wise ways. Embracing this unique brokenness allows me the grace to know my own wholeness, and to be more conscientious of creating schedules in retreat that allow others to encounter their own hidden wholeness. Being a wounded healer moves me to a place of less judgment, and invites me to "turn to wonder" at myself, at others, when the going gets rough.

Often, Courage & Renewal retreats are held in places that are imbued with a certain spirit of mystery; magical places, where the veil between the physical and the spiritual are thin, where we walk with a clear awareness of the deep traditions of sacred unity of the human world, the creaturely and natural world. Thin places have a feel that we have come to trust as sacred and nourishing. Thin places are also those places where the sense of time shifts; we become aware that we are in a place where the division between the temporal and the eternal is an illusion. We engage in reflection that takes us to the essence of what it means to be human, and to be a part of the process of making meaning that our species has been puzzling over since we developed language. Our retreats invite us to see ourselves as interwoven with all beings and creatures that inhabit this planet, made from the same elements that have existed since the universe took form. Both figuratively and literally, we are of the eternal, and we are of this unique moment. We are here now! What a miracle and gift. In reminding one another of the boundaries that mark the safety and inclusion of our Circles of Trust we agree to "be here, to be as present, in the present, as possible." We engage "third things" from our literary and poetic ancestors and from contemporary sources. We encounter the wisdom of nature by being in the presence of teachers who speak to us in the languages of millennial wisdom; ancient stones, old growth trees, rivers that run in channels carved into the bones of the earth. These teachers, both temporal and eternal, call us home to our true selves. Time, although a human construct, nevertheless is present to us as we witness the turning of the seasons, the circling of the sun, and the aging of our own bodies. We learn to treasure the gift of this one life as we walk our life journey, and the time taken in a generously,

spaciously-planned retreat can offer us the gift of doing one thing at a time, with our whole attention, in a community of companions.

Since January of 2015, I have been fortunate to be included in the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship with other Courage & Renewal facilitators from across North America. Gathering seasonally over a two-year period in the surroundings of the Kirkridge Retreat Center has been a deeply transformative time for me. I delight in coming to know this landscape as a "thin place," where the wisdom of ancestors is present, is remembered and honored; where the geography speaks of the deep connections to other landscapes, through the shaping of tectonic plate movement and glacial scraping (eternal time); and through the movement of people over thousands of years and over recent times, the Lenape people, the indigenous people of this territory, the connection to the Iona community in Scotland, the early days of creating safe and inclusive space for the LGBTQ communities, for social activists and spiritual seekers. The Kirkridge Fellowship itself has marked a rhythm of gathering in every season of the year, allowing us to see this lovely place change its face and voice, through snow and ice, heat and humidity, autumn color and the abundance of bird and frog life in summer. We have come to know this place and our circle with the trust that forms through repeated encounter, deepening from politeness and kindness to true empathy and love, shaped through puzzle, chafing, conflict and acceptance. This form of being together, in my experience, prepares me to return to my home and my work more joyfully committed to living undivided "in my one wild and precious life."

Two timepieces enrich my life: one designed with a message of invitation to embrace the present moment, one lusciously flawed that creates an awareness that spaciousness is available to me (and to others) when I accept my own woundedness and set time apart to listen to my inner teacher. Courage & Renewal retreats are gracious and nurturing spaces and times to be present in the now, in time set apart from the routines. Courage & Renewal work, at its core, equips us to know our souls' urgings, and to return to our work reinvigorated, to live undivided lives.

These are the best of times, reminding us each day to live wholeheartedly and courageously, even when faced with the worst of times.

Dianne Baker is a therapist, mother, mediator, singer, and peace worker. She has been a Courage & Renewal Facilitator since 2012. Dianne finds joy in friendship, in her garden, as a jewelry maker and recently as a Full Voice Coach. Dianne shares life with her partner, Jim Hatherly, and has roots in both Manitoba and British Columbia in Canada. She invites you to email emergingwholeness@gmail.com

Humpty Dumpty Revisited

By Caroline Fairless

I grew up on Thornton W. Burgess' *Mother West Wind "Why" Stories* and *Mother West Wind "How" Stories.* In volume after volume of short stories, Burgess always constructed his parables in the same way: *How Howler the Wolf Got His Name; How Lightfoot the Deer Learned to Jump; How the Eyes of Old Mr. Owl Became Fixed.* It was Thornton W. Burgess who taught me to read, and it was he who gave me a lifelong love of reading.

The parable that should be here today, however, is not. So, with apology to Thornton W. Burgess:

How White People Lost Their Privilege

A long long iong ever so long time ago, maybe as long as 200,000 years ago (depending on which sources . . .), the earliest of humans to be identified as homo sapiens inhabited what we now know as the great continent of Africa. They lived together and shared what they had. They helped one another build their shelters, discern and gather edible plants, hunt their meat. They looked alike and their skin was dark.

One small band, for unknown reasons – perhaps its members were convinced that they didn't have enough; perhaps they were the first

explorers – left their community to wander and fend for themselves. The group grew and grew in number, and split again, and again, and again. Others, too, left the land of their origins. Some of them traveled north and east, some south and east. Others traveled north and west. As they traveled, they lost memory of their origins, and grew inward, engaging only those who looked like themselves and thought like themselves.

The ones who traveled north and west grew tall and mean, arrogant; they also grew lighter skin. White skin was good, that's how they knew their privilege. As such, white and privileged, they had an obligation to assimilate lesser groups, to raise them up to proper standards. But first, they had to colonize them, and they went at it with great fervor.

They colonized lands already settled, and made the inhabitants their slaves. They used their slaves to get rich, and richer, and richer still. They treated the lands and the creatures in the same way they treated the people. They were builders of empires, and nothing could stop them, not even Old Mother Nature.

Old Mother Nature heard the cries of her creatures. She heard the cries of the land and the trees. She sent winds and fire, floods. She made the lands move and the mountains explode. She warned the People of Privilege and warned them again, but they paid no heed.

Finally the People of Privilege went too far. They used up the people and they used up the land. They put sicknesses in the waters and in the air, and no one – not two-leggeds, or four-leggeds, winged, or aquatic - could breathe, or drink, or eat. The People of Privilege could not fix what they had broken.

Old Mother Nature stripped them of their privilege and their vast wealth and power. All that remained was their whiteness. They grew smaller, and smaller, ever so small.

"Please," they begged. "Without our privilege, and with only our whiteness, what will we do?"

"You will go on your knees to the peoples who've ***not*** *lost their memory, and you will ask them to teach you. And if they say no – which they might - then you have to travel deep deep inside, to where your own memory lives. You will have to do that anyway."*

"But who are these people?"

"You will recognize them. They are the people whom you expelled from their own lands. They are the people whom you enslaved. They are the people you scorned, the people whose cultures you stole. But you couldn't steal their spirit, and you couldn't steal their memory.

"But as for you, your empires have crumbled, you have lost your vast riches. You have compromised your power. You will remain small and white. Others will tend to the healing of the lands and the waters, the air and all who live in them. Others will tend to the healing of the forests, the mountains, and the oceans. The forests, the mountains, and the oceans will heal themselves. In time, perhaps, they will teach you how to live."

SHRINE TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

It is referred to as the Shrine to American Democracy. A more appropriate name for Mount Rushmore might be the Shrine to American Colonization, or maybe The Celebration of Manifest Destiny or the love-child of the Doctrine of Discovery. I've never been to Mount Rushmore but I have seen *North by Northwest* more than once, and so have some sense of what it means to carve a mountain in the likenesses of the four men whose dual roles were to preserve the Republic and continue the expansion westward. To carve a mountain is no less a heinous act than to remove one, and to carve a mountain in the likenesses of these particular four Presidents adds to the desecration.

The Black Hills, site of Mount Rushmore, once belonged to the Lakota Sioux. Some would argue the land still does, and they would be in the right. The Lakota consider this land their spiritual center, "the home of our heart, and the heart of our home." A Lakota story of origin tells of their people's emergence – at the dawn of time – from deep within the mountains, so intimate a connection do the Lakota have with the sacred Black Hills.

They fought the U.S. military to hold onto their land, and from a place of strength signed the Treaty of Laramie in 1868, guaranteeing Lakota sovereignty in perpetuity. Perpetuity lasted for all of six years, until General George Custer came sniffing for gold, and found it.

As I have learned to read this story through the Lakota lens, I can feel my heart breaking again, and at last it plunges me into the deep waters of grief. The breaking open has to do not only with the facts of the truly despicable actions of the U.S. Federal Government, but even more with the realization that I have long stayed asleep to the

many moving pieces of this history, stayed asleep to what this self-congratulatory behemoth carved into the side of a sacred mountain represents to the people from whom the land was stolen and desecrated.

Writing for me often takes an unexpected turn, particularly when I am writing about what baffles me. Sometimes I follow it, sometimes not. This time there has been no such choice, because some months ago I simply stopped writing; I couldn't go any further. It took me two months just to make the decision to dig deeply into this unpredictable territory into which I'd been dropped. During these months I could not write, such was my resistance. Before I could continue, I have had first to face into other kinds of truths.

Russell Means says, *"The Black Hills are not for sale."*

Trebbe Johnson, speaking of a northwestern clear-cut, says, "*Gaze even here.*"

And Ta-Nehisi Coates tells his son, "*You must never look away from this.*"

The Lakota Sioux, the Black Hills of South Dakota, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and a clear-cut forest are on the receiving end of – I want to say unprecedented, but that is not even close to the truth – violence. You must never look away from this. I am struggling to understand what these admonitions mean for me.

From Jeanette Armstrong, Okanagan writer and speaker, who wants to "Okanaganize everyone" and who helps me remember that the Holy Land is the land under my feet, to Ta-Nehisi Coates who tells me that white people ("or at least those who believe they are white") are white by "modern invention," that "democracy is a forgiving God and America's heresies – torture, theft, enslavement – are so common among individuals and nations that none can declare themselves immune," I know that it is time to face into my own blindness.

I have lived under the illusion that I am and have been awakening into consciousness, and I suppose I have. But my reading and conversations over the last three years are giving me a different message, suggesting mine has been a false sense of awakening; the haze was, and no doubt is, still with me. My question is, what do I do with this? Who will talk to me? There are so many things I will never know. What do I do with this? I have no answers.

The grief has been raw and powerful, a seeming bottomless well, which has left me vulnerable and fragile, and, ironically, resolved. It's the grief of waking up to the real meaning and impact of white privilege. It's the grief of what white privilege has cost everyone, has cost all life: the land, the waters, humankind, and other-than-humankind. It's the grief of treaties made and broken. The grief of promises not kept, of greed, of corporate violence, violence of all kinds. The grief of how casually and routinely a Black

life can be stolen by a policeman's fear and hatred. It's the grief of acknowledgement of the gap between what I have thought was my level of consciousness and the blinders I still wear. The grief of shame. It's the grief of being able to enlarge my own footprint whenever it's convenient for me, even as I preach a different challenge. And, of course, it's the grief of "Gaze even here" and "You must never look away from this."

The Black Hills are not for sale.

It's the grief of yearning... Of elusive and heated – even dangerous - conversations in which I don't know how to participate without intruding as a white person. It's the grief of not knowing how to be invited in without inviting myself, or, if inviting myself, doing so without intrusion or worse – cultural appropriation. It's the grief of reading Ta-Nehisi Coates, in a letter to his son (*Between the World and Me*, 2015), tell of an interview with a well-known journalist who kept asking him the wrong questions, and Coates having to tell his son that it was he himself who had failed. The grief of knowing that my questions would have been no better. It's the grief of knowing I am not yet trustworthy in so many ways. It's the grief of having to apply the word "colonizer" to myself.

It's the grief of the woundedness of the land and the waters, the literal extinction of exquisite beauty – four-legged, two-legged, finned, winged, branched, flowered. The grief – I perceive it as visceral pain – of clear-cut forests and vast West Virginia mountaintops simply bulldozed into the valleys.

Above all, it's the grief of knowing that the white privileged will not likely willingly move aside for the leaders and healers essential for this time.

Over the summer, as I was driving home on a dark rainy night, this grief manifested itself in a riotous parade of hundreds of thumb-sized wood frogs doomed on their journey across a macadam road. That night, weeping without even knowing why, I stopped my car, leaving its four-ways blinking, and gently nudged every frog to the other side of the road. The mile and a half took me nearly two hours.

How do I gaze on this?

I see myself as a Humpty Dumpty figure with a different and as yet unsung ending. Cracked, bruised, torn apart, heartbroken, vulnerable, but still here. All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again. This is the truth; it was precisely the King's horses and the King's men who couldn't do it. Nor can they do it now. This is the truth for me as well. White privilege cannot accomplish it; white privilege can only hold on to what it knows. Knowing this, just this, is a blessing for me, however. I have no words for this humility and hope, only questions.

Dr. Sherry K. Watt, in *Designing Transformative Multicultural Initiatives*, speaks of the process of deconstruction, a process which must take place before anything else can. I think of it as the essential art of "un-becoming" before it is possible to "re-become." Watt's language helps me contextualize the grief of these years and to understand that deconstruction and reconstruction are lifelong processes... Once begun, never finished.

Statement of fact: this painful and essential process of my own awakening would not have been possible outside the safe and challenging embrace of the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship. Although I would not have envisioned this "rising up from slumber" as a desirable outcome, the irony is not lost on me that what has "become of me" is the direct embodiment of the intention I offered into the universe as I groped with the first awkward attempts to articulate the required Plan for Still Learning.

I wrote this: *When this invitation plopped itself into my inbox, I felt the quickening of my heart in such a way as tells me this is right, this is the next part of my journey. This quickening doesn't come without its fair measure of fear. I have said, and mean it, that I like my "little" life. But I know as well I am reaching for something, and I haven't the courage or the capability to accomplish it by myself.*

I wrote this: *I have known for some time that the next level of my writing requires a new partner for the intellectual part of me, a partnership that I haven't yet dared. I have been writing from my thoughts and ideas alone. The silent "not-yet" partner is my deep visceral creative force which I've not allowed to show up much. I have a shadow need to control creative outcomes (that's an oxymoron) – and because the visceral deep down force is not under my willful control, I rarely dare to access it.*

And I wrote this: *In the writing driven by my intellect, I have been able to slide around my fear of "surprises," by keeping a pretty tight rein on my direction.*

My cerebral function usually works overtime, not so the case with my "entanglement" function. A shadow need to control outcomes is not conducive to collaboration. So, I can write the following statement, and know the truth of it, with embarrassingly little engagement: *Human social justice and environmental (ecological) justice efforts must become entangled; neither can be accomplished without the other. The same is true of human diversity and biodiversity. The rationale, by now, I am hoping has become clear. It is all of a piece. Every life form on this living planet, whether animate or inanimate, is interconnected and interdependent.*

Don Santos Wilca, Peruvian shaman, writes *". . . all who live in this* pasha *(earth) are persons: the stone, the soil, the plants, the water, the hail, the wind, the diseases, the sun, the moon, the stars, we are all one."* As I bob up and down in these waters of grief, this statement, true all along, rings with a transfigured pulse and heartbeat.

There are new questions catching hold of me: what are the ethical and spiritual dimensions of continuing to work solo? Can I continue to do this and make it work? Might I be able to learn to collaborate? These questions and so many others cause whiplash! Although I would like to take credit for this inner movement, I can't. The soul of the universe has called me. How can I say no to that? Life is richer as my eyes - which I already assumed were open - begin in truth to open, no matter the pain of it.

Statement of fact: my ongoing awakening would not be possible outside the safe and challenging embrace of the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship. This sense of being held is what allows me to test my still drying wings, my fledgling wings, and I try these wings out by reflecting on the spiritual dimension of third party voting:

As an Episcopal priest (retired), conservationist, and unapologetic progressive, I hear a lot of comments about a Green party vote in November, some of them hostile. My step-daughter asks, *"How can you say mine is a throwaway vote?"* She says, *"I should not feel guilty about voting my heart. I have a moral obligation to vote my conscience."*

The political dimension is fairly straightforward.

The spiritual dimension is more complex.

The United States has always lifted up its individualism, a misguided pride with spiritual consequences. Perhaps there was a time, although it could be otherwise argued, when individualism was an asset, but we are not living in a time such as that. This era cries out for collaboration, cooperation, and partnership. Against that tapestry of the collective citizenry, the personal "I" or "me" is indicative of white privilege. Privileged white people get to vote according to their own self-interest, whether it is economic, ecological, educational, or anything else. The spiritual dimension, however, is about community.

There are two African words which belong in this conversation. One is *ubuntu*. I first heard the word from the lips of the Rev. Michael Battle in a keynote talk at a summer symposium. *Ubuntu – I am because we are*. It is a word of the spirit; we create each other; we belong to each other; we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others. At Nelson Mandela's funeral, President Barack Obama remarked that Mandela was the personification of the word.

The other word is *kwanele*, which, translated from Zulu, means *it is enough*. Like *ubuntu, kwanele* is a word of the spirit. Anything more than enough is in excess; anything more than enough is greed. Together these concepts of respect, dignity, and kindness needed to have formed the spiritual bedrock of this 2016 election. It did not happen.

The tenor of our current political conversation has sickened our country; we seem to have stepped out of our collective soul. We can do better (maybe), I think, if we can release the fear and anger enough to remember what this is about: it's about the collective soul, the world's soul; it's about whole-hearted-ness; it's about our rich diversity; and it's about our dream of justice and our struggle for its fruits.

Today, on this side of my Humpty Dumpty life, I know *ubuntu* to embrace not only the human world, but the non-human, and what Frederique Apffel-Marglin calls the *other-than-human world*, referring to the spirits who were here long before we humans were, and who, I believe, are doing their utter overtime best to open our anthropocentric eyes to the concept of kinship all around. What I have called the *cerebral statement* earlier in this chapter, has become richer by far.

My life, as it enters a reconstructive moment, has allowed me another reflection as well: *It is a Thursday late afternoon, September 8, 2016. Thursday is the day I work long distance, by telephone, with my energy healer whose name is Molly. Molly's training in the traditional medicine practices of tribal peoples has been in partnership with Marcellus Bear Heart Williams, elder from the Muskogee Creek Nation; her mentoring continued until his death in 2005. They co-authored* The Wind is My Mother, *first published in 1996.*

As we spend an hour together each week, I in New Hampshire, Molly in Michigan, I realize I have no idea what she is doing or how she is doing it. I know only that mine has always been an earth-based spirituality, and so I am in familiar territory. She has asked me to set an intention for the session into the universe, and I do. I do not share with her its content. During the session a community grows within me, and I myself am holding connection to all the people who have turned to Molly for healing. Like a copse of trees whose roots travel underground to find one another and exchange nutrients, I am connected in that way. Bear Heart is there, along with the millions of people whose lives he touched. It's quite the gathering.

And then I see myself as part of an endless snaking parade of Native American and First Nations men and women and children. We have come to stand alongside the Standing Rock Sioux. Some are on horseback, in full dress regalia, others in T-shirts and jeans, some with drums; a constant ululation fills the air. A flotilla of canoes are arriving. Many white people are marching. We are in cars, on foot, riding motorcycles. We have come to stand with the Protectors of the waters of the Black Hills, to hold fast against the seventeen banks (and then president-elect) financing the Dakota Access Pipeline, to hold fast against the policing of seven states hired to rid the land of its Protectors, policing which takes violence to creative new levels. We have come to hold fast against those who would bulldoze, dig, and lay pipe. Today, on the other end of a telephone line with Molly my healer, my intention into the universe is to find my place within this Protectorate, and it has been realized. In my vision, I am there,

grateful, as all attendant white people are, to stand shoulder to shoulder. I am as white as ever, but the shift in my presence, my resolve, my commitment, and my knowing is palpable. Spiritually, I am about to enter the ***space between*** *where the indigenous and non-indigenous meet.*

At the time of this writing, I am heading back into my circle of the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship for another year. Someday these embodied gatherings will end, I suppose, and I can hardly stand to anticipate it. But ours is a forever fellowship. I imagine that all of us, at the beginning, thought we knew our deepest desires; I know with some certainty that many or all of us had no idea of how our time together would unfold. I stated in my original learning plan that I wanted to know where I fit in this collaborative. I still would like to know that. Perhaps it is still unfolding. What I do know, however, is that my writing has deepened. On the reconstruction side of a significant process of deconstruction, I turn to wonder each time I share an assumption, or a presumption, or even an opinion. What would this look like, I wonder, if I were looking through the lens of an Issac Bailey who writes for Politico, or a David Archambault, witness to the United Nations about the Dakota Access Pipeline, or an Eduardo Hidalgo, the first Mexican non-military secretary of the Navy under the presidency of George H. W. Bush? What would it look like from the perspective of my Texas niece and her wife? What would it look like through the eyes of the thousands of school children across the country walking out of their classrooms to protest the results of the 2016 election?

The Mobius journey that I have long called mine, has added thickness and depth; it has been and continues to be the gift of this Fellowship.

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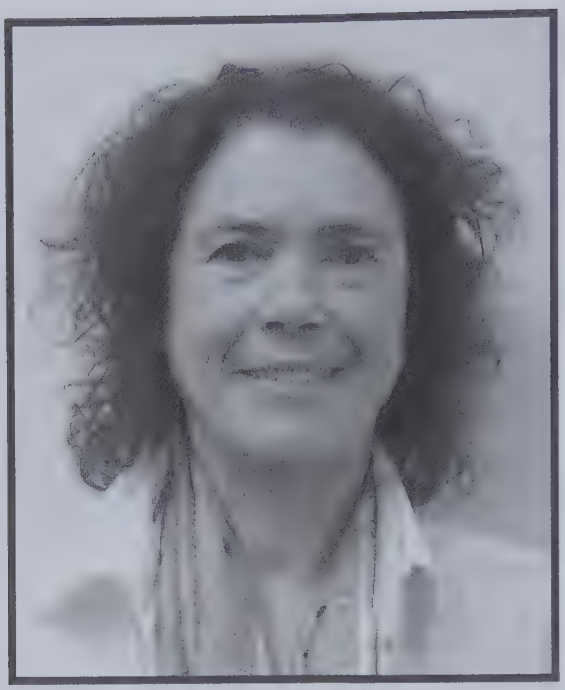

Letting My Life Speak: The Power of Autobiographical Practices

By Patti Smith

"Let your life speak" is an old Quaker saying that often moves in me as my eyes roam me around each new circle of people to reveal connections, as my breath tumbles me inward to touch myself. Longing often whisks me away to distant wishes as I journey along pilgrimage paths, seeking connections to myself, to others and to the practices that will enable me to find both. Parker Palmer reasserts the meaning of letting your life speak in his book of the same name, writing, *"Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent."*

My life speaks to me through stories, mapping my autobiography across places I have lived, people who have influenced me, and work I have chosen. In the early 90s, I left a position I loved as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher to enter a world mostly unfamiliar to me because I wanted desperately to work in educational settings serving traditionally "underserved" children. I wanted to make creative, play-based early childhood education available to students attending urban public schools. The path to that end required advanced degrees and unique connections into cultural worlds with

which I had limited experience. Daunting, but I somehow made it possible.

I share this particular story here because it has shaped my life for the past 25 years and allows me to illustrate my reasons for advocating autobiographical studies. One day in 1993, in my 42nd year of life, the parent of one of my kindergarten students told me that she had just attended a fascinating meeting about local education. The program was sponsored by a well-known African American professor who just happened to be looking for a research associate. I asked her if she could connect me to him. She did, and I ended up working for this prominent professor in a university setting that provided entry into the world of underserved students I yearned to serve.

We conducted research studies across the country in urban and rural areas as I completed my graduate studies. I found myself positioned perfectly to meet my goals, as I also worked with a group of educators to develop public Waldorf schools, grounded in the thinking of Rudolph Steiner. A challenge in this work, among many, was to find language that moved past traditional Waldorf rhetoric to build bridges with the public educators. Seeking words that acknowledged the importance of the inner life of the teacher, I turned to Parker Palmer's recently published *The Courage to Teach*. His words touched me through their capacity to lift up the ways the inner capacity of a teacher had to be ignited to release the kind of impactful teaching that led to better experiences for children. I decided to attend the facilitator preparation offered by the Center for Courage & Renewal.

Within a short time of leaving my beloved kindergarten, I had let my life speak through the people it allowed me to meet and the places it enabled me to go. Not to say that I didn't have great challenges, successes and disappointments along the way... As a matter of fact, I completely failed at creating the programs I set out to develop for young children. But now, looking back, I see that I was directing myself forward, inner compass steering me.

In my twenties Steiner's philosophy entered my life as I wholeheartedly embraced Waldorf education. In mid-life continued Courage and Renewal facilitation enriched me, leading me to yet another community committed to spiritual development. Both of these communities continue to be significant to me, as I hope I am significant to them.

DAILY PRACTICE FOR LETTING MY LIFE SPEAK

I have come to understand that my efforts to experience the world from a deeply conscious perspective require active inner and outer participation. Just as riding my bicycle every day strengthens my physical body, so too it is necessary to develop inner muscles so I can attend to inner and as well as outer deeds. Rudolf Steiner's

six essential exercises, the Courage touchstones, and autobiographical studies form the basis of my daily practice that allow me to let my life speak.

Steiner's exercises have been the bicycle for my spiritual body (from Michael Lipson's *Stairway of Surprise: Six Steps to a Creative Life;* also see http://tomvangelder.antrovista.com/pdf/basic.pdf):

1. The Control of Thought
Steiner's first exercise has to do with the control of thinking, designed to keep the mind focused to strengthen meditative work. Select a simple object - a pin, a button, a pencil. Try to think about it for five minutes. Think about the way the object is manufactured, how it is used, and its history. Try to be logical and realistic in your thinking. Catch yourself each time your mind wanders and continue thinking about it. Practice it daily, using the same object or new objects.

2. The Control of Will
This exercise strengthens the ability to take deliberate action at one's own willing. Choose a simple action to perform each day at the same time, one that is doable under a variety of circumstances--wiggling your fingers, touching your shoe, walking up a flight of stairs, watering a flower.

3. Equanimity: Balancing the Life of Feelings
The third exercise is the development of balance between joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, the heights of pleasure and the depths of despair. Try not becoming angry or annoyed, not being anxious or fearful, nor being overcome by joy or sorrow. Feelings should be quietly felt with composure leading to an inner tranquility.

4. Loving: Working with thinking and feeling
This exercise is the development of a positive attitude toward life. Seek to experience the good, praiseworthy, and beautiful in all beings. This develops the ability to be positive toward others rather than critical.

5. Open Mindedness: Working with feeling and willing
For this exercise, confront new experiences with complete open-mindedness. The possibility of something completely new coming into the world must be left open, even if it contradicts existing knowledge and experience.

6. Harmony of thinking, feeling, and willing
After trying the earlier exercises of thinking, will, equilibrium, positivity and tolerance, try them together two or three at a time, in varying combinations until they become natural and harmonious.

My regular practice of these exercises has made me a better Courage facilitator, able to embody the touchstones of our Circles of Trust. The touchstones are the boundary markers for creating a trustworthy space, to help strangers to feel safe with each other during a retreat. (More about these boundary markers may be found in the Stepping Stone in this section.) I have often marveled at the ease with which people agree to these touchstones, and I recognize that these guidelines have helped me to counter my tendency to feel compelled to problem-solve and judge people. They allow me to meet my inner teacher, rooting me in the everyday reality of the soul/spiritual world that is as real as the physical world.

INVITING THE SHY SOUL THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Courage Circles acknowledge the shy soul, with an intentional design to support the emergence of that courageous soul in what is too often a harsh world. As facilitators, we invite the soul toward active participation, using poetry, music, and movement, which we call third things, to create the space for souls to emerge. But I worry that without a sustained practice, individual souls will retreat when that group disperses at the end of a Courage retreat.

For me, it is important to acknowledge the necessity to develop a disciplined practice to bear the "coming out of the soul" on a daily basis, an intentional way of breath tumbling me inward to touch myself. I have found autobiographical studies exercises to be the third thing that lets my life speak/shout/whisper to me from the world within and around me.

Life phases occur across time's natural rhythms. Patterns can be observed, like the movement of ocean waves in sets of seven, the trees across four seasons, moons across months to explore Palmer's question, *"Is the life I am living the same as the life that wants to live in me*?" I find Thomas Cole's four paintings from 1842, *The Voyage of Life*, a strong metaphor for explaining autobiographic studies, as the series depicts four phases of human life: childhood, early adulthood, mid-life, and old age (http://www.explorethomascole.org/tour/items/73/series/). Each painting shows a person in a boat on a river with an ethereal being present, as if a guide, in a landscape that beautifully portrays one of the four seasons.

Living into the paintings, I am clear that each phase of life has particular attributes and expectations for us as human beings. In childhood we make our entry to earth, guidance close at hand. In early adulthood, we are launched from the shore, beginning to navigate our particular destiny, birth family bidding farewell from the shore. In mid-life we weather storms, and guidance seems far away and hard to find in the darkness. Then, in old age, the light grows again as we face upward preparing to exit, guidance ahead rather than lost or behind us.

EXERCISES FOR BIOGRAPHICAL WORK

What is my story across these phases? What can I learn from my family, my name, my place in sibling birth order? From the season into which I was born? Is there something significant about my body type, where I lived, my parents' occupations, that I had no parents? What were my birthright gifts and what skills and characteristics were missing from my backpack when I was launched into my earth vessel? When did I leave my family, why did I leave, who were the first adults that influenced me? What interested me? What made me happy/sad? How did my life of work begin? When were my children born? What illnesses have I suffered? When did important people in my life die? Who were colleagues and foes in my professional life?

Dr. Gudrun Burkhard has explored such questions with her patients, using them to inform her medical practice. Her research, documented in *Biographical Work: An Anthroposophical Basis* (2002), shares a series of questions specific to each life phase. These questions offer a doorway into autobiographical studies, work that develops greater consciousness of the everyday events in our lives and their importance.

Exploring connections in my life confirms my belief that it is no accident that I met certain people and made particular choices. Pondering these specific questions, I began to see myself more actively participating in my life. A few exercises are provided here with the hope that there may be meaning for you:

- Mapping the seasons of my life: Identify events, people, and places across various phases. Begin with the seasons, broad strokes across life phases, as represented in the Cole paintings: birth to 21 (youth), 21-42 (early adulthood), 42-63 (mid-life), 63-84+ (old age). What patterns emerge across these four phases of your life? When did particular influential people enter your life and how did the relationships play out over time? Did patterns in illness appear over time? When were career/professional choices made and how did those choices play out? The table on page 39 provides a way you might want to chart these cycles. What key people, places, and events arise in your heart when you let your life speak to you across years? (To learn more about these phases, you may wish to read Signe Eklund Schaefer's *Why on Earth: Biography and the Practice of Human Becoming.)*

Phase	People	Places	Events	Other
Childhood: Birth to 21				
Early adulthood 21-42				
Mid-life 42-63				
Old age 63-84+				

- Mapping seven-year phases of my life: Explore these seven-year phases represented in the weekly rhythm: birth to 7, early childhood; 7-14, later childhood; 14-21, adolescence; 21-28, early adulthood, finding myself; 28-35, adulthood, becoming myself; 35-42, adulthood, most fully engaged in my life; 42-49, early mid-life; 49-56, mid-life; 56-63, late mid-life; 63-70, early old age, life forces less vibrant; 70-77, old age; 77 and beyond, late old age.

Phase	People	Places	Events	Other
Birth to 7				
7-14				
7th year				
8th year				
9th year				
10th year				
11th year				
12th year				
13th year				
14-21				
21-28				
28-35				
35-42				
42-49				
49-56				
56-63				

- Chance to change: Take a minute to think of an important chance conversation/meeting that ended up having tremendous impact on your life. After identifying that event, follow the thread that linked to the source of the encounter and then follow the thread to this moment in time. Write about the chance meeting that became significant and the important people, places, and opportunities that entered your life as a result.

- Finding my people: Have you ever had the experience when introduced to someone for the first time, that they were no stranger to you; your heart leapt as if to acknowledge, there you are, my old friend, finally! I have had this happen to me many times. My appreciation grows for friends, colleagues, and family, the more conscious I am about the string of events that brought us together and opportunities that entered into my life with each of them. Take a moment to reflect on a first meeting that felt more like a "finding" than an" introduction" and where it has taken you.

- Mine my mentors: Identify a person you consider a mentor. Remember the day you met, the circumstances, the time of year, the location. What were the characteristics of this person that inspired you to seek her/his counsel? Recall the first experience you had together. What other people were there, what ideas were embraced? What tasks did you undertake as a result of meeting this person? Map the threads of the relationships across the years to see what other events, people, and activities were influenced by this person.

- Life Story Dialogues: For the past two years I have been involved in life story dialogues, structured conversations with a colleague for the purpose of sharing our stories across seven-year phases. We developed a three-part process that included preparation, conversation and reflection. Each month we prepared by writing our experiences, based on a series of Burkhard's questions for one of the life phases, beginning with birth to seven. First we charted important events to answer the questions specific to the phase and sent our written stories to each other with a promise to review them before meeting. The second part required our coming together for conversations that included our each having twenty minutes to share, with the listener recording the story and then mirroring it back, with no advice. We agreed that an important aspect of this exercise was to learn how to witness for each other, providing a vessel to hear our stories with higher fidelity. Confidentiality was a cornerstone of the process as we agreed not to share our discussions with anyone. Finally, for part three, we wrote a process reflection to each other a week after the meeting. Each meeting took about two hours, including a few minutes for conversation. After conducting this exercise for 18 months, we acknowledged we had established a unique relationship, grounded in trust and exploration. We know more about each other than we do about many longer-term friends and even family members.

My colleague has given me permission to share this information here with you, as we feel we have created an exercise that you may use to deepen relationships, practice conversation in its highest form, and learn how lives

unfold differently in service of meeting destiny. We learned that we had extremely different childhoods, different relationships to our parents and siblings and different paths to our professions. I felt deeply loved by my parents and had strong bonds to family. My friend had a lonely childhood, with no strong bonds with her parents or siblings. We learned that her harsh early years led to her deep love of books and writing. My strong sense of family and religiosity likely influenced my love for working in community and strong commitment to spiritual development from an early age. We learned that illness touched each of us, at different times in our lives and with varying degrees of intensity, and yet in both cases, we could see that illness propelled us toward important life changes.

Our career paths are very different: I am an educator comfortable working with groups of people, while she is a psychotherapist, preferring the intimacy of working with individuals, couples, or families. Our sessions revealed the continuing themes of meaning and purpose in each of our lives, allowing a deeper understanding of ourselves. We found it to be important and insightful to work so intimately with another person, to take the time to listen to our lives speak and to hear how differently our destinies spoke through our experiences and relationships. We are still meeting together, working on a series of practices to deepen our capacity.

- Cast into the future: Allow the future to emerge in all of its newness. Consider an important event from the past. In quietness, observe the clearest picture possible of the actual situation: the place, time of year, colors, season, number of people involved, even what people were wearing. What smells, what sounds can you remember, and what was the nature of the event; describe the action/drama that was happening. Pay attention to your heart as you develop the picture; invite your brain, shouting in your head to squelch the image rising in your heart, to rest. When the picture is clear, write about it or draw it. Once you are satisfied with your description, let go of the image. Allow it to sink all the way down into the earth. Letting go is important to the exercise. In the emptiness, allow a new image to enter into you and the world... A surprise!

Engaging in these exercises has given me a deep appreciation for how much the people I meet affect the voices of my life, letting it speak to me through them. Noticing the particular circumstances and outcomes of my encounters with people deepens my capacity to experience the deliberateness of my life as it unfolds.

Studying one's life from this observational perspective can become part of a regular

inner practice that grows soul/spiritual capacities. It requires both stepping deeply into the event being observed and disappearing from it. When preparing for life story dialogues or other autobiographical study, it is important not only to consider myself in the situation being described, but to develop the capacity to see it through the eyes of others involved to be less self-centered. Autobiographical studies have not only helped me understand my own life, but have given me insights into my parents, children, colleagues, and friends, leading to greater understanding and respect. For example, when mapping life experiences across phases, I noticed a difficult challenge I faced at 43 when I took on a totally new position. In recalling my childhood, I realized my father faced a crisis at the same age. I remembered the difficulties that developed in my relationship with him at the time, and suddenly I had a much deeper appreciation for his state of being. I realized his anger was likely with his situation, not really with me. I wished he were still alive so I could discuss this insight with him. That made me wonder if I treated my children harshly when I was going through my similar experience? Fortunately, they are still alive, and I have the opportunity to talk with them.

During a recent workshop, my participants were reviewing their 42-49 life phase. One gentleman said, *"I can't believe what new awareness I have into my mother's life as I look at mine when I am at the age she was when I was a teenager! I have to call her about my newfound understanding of her positions at that time."* Another man shared that he asked his mother about her childhood during a phone conversation. She was quite touched, because no one had ever asked her about her childhood or how she felt about her life. He decided to have monthly conversations with her so she could share her life story with him. These conversations were the doorway to a new relationship with his mother.

Dan Wakefield's *Story of Your Life: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography* (1990) affirms that autobiographical studies are both solitary and interactive exercises. He reminds his readers that it is not only important to write your spiritual autobiography, but it is also important to share that story, to make it public. In workshops all over the country, including people in prisons and veterans and writing circles, Dan said his students taught him that in the right situation, one is not only able but is inwardly urged to share the story, to have others witness it, lifting the work to a community engagement realm.

Autobiographical studies demand interaction. Inner capacities are developed; daring to share develops courage; hearing with an open heart develops humility, purging the tendency to judge others. The work deepens the capacity for respecting differences and noticing commonalities. For this reason, autobiographical studies may well be the core social art of the future.

In Courage circles, we invite participants to listen with open hearts. My experience, confirmed by others, is that I hear myself one way when I speak to myself; I hear myself differently when my words are held reverently by another. If someone agrees to listen to me using this selfless gesture, my story is embellished through them as I hear newness in it. My life speaks not only through me, but through the lenses of others around me... Eyes roaming me around a circle of people to reveal connections.

ENTERING OLD AGE

As I grow older, the relationships, connections, and patterns have increased over many fruitful years of living. From an autobiographical studies perspective, past experiences serve as stepping stones as I cast lines of experience forward to guide me towards my future. My many rich experiences and relationships inform my choices for the future, hopefully the seed that connects old age to wisdom. Using autobiographical studies, the attributes of each life phase and viewing myself in each phase, have helped to uncover who I have become, how I have traveled on the earth, and with whom I have agreed to travel.

Not only have I learned from the past using autobiographical studies as a resource, but I am developing the capacity to face the future with excitement. Preparing to re-form myself, I am conjuring my final creative splash to greet mortality with serenity. Allowing myself to move gracefully into old age and the final stage is not easy in this face of a culture that encourages working into my seventh decade. The exciting aspect of this phase is creating the opportunity to pause, look back over my life, gather into my heart all the people, places and activities that ring in me as *I let my life tell me what truths I embody, what values I represent.* My last years are my chance to carry these values, skills, and passions as an elder, living fully as the person my life has enabled me to become.

My challenge now is to carry myself in a new way, one for which there are few models to emulate. How I approach this final chapter, depends on how and what I grasp from the future as well as the past. Can I listen for the needs of the unborn and new ideas needed to cultivate the earth and her people? Can I prepare the space for the younger generation, allowing myself to become a lifeline for them? Have I adequately cultivated the capacity to listen to other lives speak? Can I hear my own future calling me?

Time is a great teacher. Engaging in a daily practice helps me feel more confident that I won't try to fix people, that I will be able to turn to wonder instead of fear, and that I can witness another person's story confidentially and wholeheartedly. The autobiographical studies exercises in my practice let me listen to my life as it tells

me what it intends to do with me, as it reminds me of what I have already done and what I am still longing to do: journeying along pilgrimage paths, seeking connection to myself and to others and to the practice that will enable me to find both. More than once when I least expected it, I had a flash of insight, revealing the role that an encounter played in my life. Pondering the reality of these intersections over and over, I am humbled to experience the multidimensional and complex-but-wildly-sensible way in which my life speaks to me.

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A STEPPING STONE

BOUNDARY MARKERS
for the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program
To Create a Circle of Trust with Clear Boundaries for Safety and Hospitality

"every circle of trust, regardless of size, requires that everyone in it help hold safe space..." --Parker J. Palmer

- Be here. Be as present as possible.
- Extend welcome and receive welcome.
- Invitation only. It's never demand... Never share or die!
- Speak your Truth into the center of the circle in ways that respect the Truths of others. No fixing!

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies...
--Emily Dickinson

- When it's hard, turn to wonder.
- See others – and especially yourself -- with "soft eyes." Hear others – and especially yourself and your own inner teacher.
- Welcome silence, knowing that it allows you to listen to your Life speak, to hear your inner teacher.
- Let the Beauty you love be what you do.

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.
--Rumi

- Protect confidentiality; honor the idea of deep and double confidentiality.
- Embrace the possibility that it's possible to emerge from this work with more energy, more openness, with grace, with "soft eyes," with everything you need for this journey.

--Adapted by Sally Z. Hare for the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program, 2015-2016, from various versions of Courage & Renewal touchstones and boundary markers and always with gratitude to Dr. Judy Brown for her original touchstones.

Seeing Racism or Setting It Aside: Another Set of Eyes

By Sue E. Small

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know." *-William Wilberforce*

The video link of Jalen's social studies project, *My Thoughts on Racial Awareness*, arrived in my email one recent fall morning. Jalen is the oldest child of one of my godsons. He was sharing with me his interpretation of an assignment given to his seventh-grade class to create a public service announcement that would include his thoughts and opinions, provide research to support his thoughts, elicit emotional responses from an audience, and stimulate action. Jalen's goal was to know how other people thought about racism so he could know more about it himself. He developed questions:

- *What is racism?*
- *Why is it so difficult to stop racism?*
- *How can we take action to stop racism?*

Then, on video, he interviewed a diverse group of people representing different races, ethnicities, genders, and ages. This project, envisioned and developed by a young man I love, seemed the perfect way for me to review my own journey into living life on the color line. To see racism from my own eyes, I needed do a fearless inventory of my inner journey with the issue. It has required me to go deeper into what I had experienced and learned in my outer environment both explicitly and implicitly, and finally to question my lack of motivation to understand the "tragic gaps" in my own experiences of racism along the way.

I am nearly 65 years older than Jalen. We have had similar experiences, including questioning social situations we observe. What then has made the difference? What has enabled him to see and study racism now? And what is it that enables me only now to publicly express my inner journey of reflection and analysis of my own racism and how I have expressed it in the outer world? I am aware of a shift from seeing only with my eyes, from my limited perspective, to honoring and integrating the perspectives of others to create another worldview, as Jalen sought to do in his research. Making this shift, I feel humbled by Jalen who is my newest teacher, as I hope to join others who have the courage to confront and not to "set aside" seeing racism and to continue to question the motives, integrity, and goals of my actions.

In this story, my story, I explore both the hidden conversations I have with myself and the more public conversations I have had with others who also have been my teachers. I hope to describe the process of the internalization of racism in my identity, my whiteness. It is this exploration into my soul as well as my role as facilitator in conversations about racism and racial justice that compels me to know who I am and the message of my life. Without that understanding I am colorblind in the role of the facilitator and lack the capacity to hold safe space within a circle and with respect to everyone in our racialized society, the wider world, and even myself.

RACISM FROM MY OWN EYES: LEARNING TO SET ASIDE

The topic of racism has become an important and essential theme throughout my adult life. Earlier, as a teacher, a family member, and later, as a teacher educator, that was not always the case. As I envisioned my retirement from the academic life, I wanted to devote time to reflection and to embracing some of the areas of my life I had "set aside" earlier, specifically focusing on the language and literacy as well as the history at the heart of racism. (The term "set aside" is used in conflict communications to refer to an act of putting aside areas of disagreement in order to move forward to achieve a desired outcome.)

I once wrote, "My journey began years ago in my heart," and, in fact, it did. Mine has been a journey of formation and faith, beginning with learning to trust and love God,

others, and myself. This now is the time for me to go public about my journey and the recognition that I need to strengthen my racial awareness and clarify actions for racial justice. I acknowledge Jalen as my new teacher, yet he was not the first.

My initial thoughts and feelings about racial awareness were that I would be able to take off the masks I have worn and go deeper into my heart, mind, soul and role. This I believed would be possible when I no longer needed to hide my real self in order to be successful in my life and career. As I have taken action to go deeper to find my real self, I see the paradoxical and troubling ways in which my eyes were unable to see this "real self" as a person benefiting from racism and the structures and systems that hold it in place, nor could I see that I really didn't want to confront it. It wasn't my career that encouraged my "set asides"; it was both wanting access to success and the fear of losing the hidden privilege of whiteness.

Each time I reflect on my journey with racism, I recognize that I may never understand what peoples of color have endured and face, particularly now at this time in the history of the United States. This does not change my commitment to continue, but it does make necessary another set of eyes, even many other sets of eyes.

Jalen's social studies project and his selection of racism to research made it clear to me that now is a Kairos moment. I may have intellectualized about racism before, but when my precious loved one and his sisters, as well as all of our brothers and sisters, are living in this decisive moment, I can no longer set it aside. Conversations about race, once hidden within our families and like-minded communities, are now bursting forth in an outpouring of many voices with urgent heart-wrenching stories. We are engaging in dialogue about racial awareness and racial justice in schools and universities, books, news media, documentaries, and social media. As I join these conversations, I am faced with new truths about my own learned attitudes.

I now see, more often from other perspectives that which I once could not see at all: racial disparities in the laws, policies, and practices of our racialized society. Yet, there is still much that I cannot see. As a woman of Anglo-Saxon heritage who is now an elder, I can see, hear, and feel emotions of chaos, fear, shame, conflict and change. Nevertheless, I can still, as a white woman, set aside my feelings and go out into the world safely, wearing what Peggy McIntosh named the "knapsack of white privilege," unafraid of losing my life in any given moment (http://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack).

It is not just. We need change.

The gifts of this chaos, these escalating conflicts, are the seeds of change. This is a Kairos moment. It is a time when conditions are right for accomplishing the

crucial actions of individuals, communities, corporations, governments, and countries to transform awareness to action for racial justice.

So we must continue. I **will** continue.

LOOKING BACK: MOMENTS IN MY HISTORY

Unearthing my long-buried experiences, stemming from a culture of silence and a history of ignoring the structures of racism, has taken years and active seeking. This process has been facilitated by a shift from seeing the world from my own perspective to seeing the hidden wholeness of life, not only my life but that of others, and knowing that life is ever-changing. This shift is not something I accomplished; rather, it is something I have noticed, named, and nurtured as I have continued to pursue this area in my life's inventory.

Early in my life I was motivated by the ideal of success. I believed in working hard, climbing the ladder of success, and hopefully, relaxing into retirement. Yet along the way, I learned that some of these themes seemed to collide with other themes I valued: family, caring for others, fairness and justice, honesty and truth, loving and wanting to be loved and accepted. When my themes collided, I sometimes used the "set aside."

Growing up in a small town in southern Ohio, I learned about people of the "Heartland," but not about all of the people. I believed we were the face of America, the norm; yet we were all white people. There were no people of color in our town. We had little access to racial or ethnic diversity in the community or in our schools. Throughout my childhood and early adolescence, I was not consciously aware of the need to develop an in-depth awareness of my own heritage or to acquire cross-racial understanding through learning the histories and cultures of people of color, including Native Americans. I thought I was just normal, but in fact this perception has been identified as one of the "two primary privileges of whiteness":

> 1) to assume that whiteness is the norm against which everyone else should be compared and
>
> 2) the privilege to live one's life without ever needing to be aware of one's whiteness and how it might be impacting one's life. (Lyubansky, https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/between-the-lines/201112/the-meaning-whiteness 2011)

I was a part of the norm in that geographic area. Notwithstanding the fact that I had little opportunity to learn from experience about racial awareness, I was aware, as very young children often are, of differences in people based on the color of their skin. An example was the interracial couple who lived near my mother's sister and

her family in Cincinnati. My mother would take me to their home, and we would be greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Martin. Mrs. Martin was known as an excellent seamstress; her work provided the family's financial support, because Mr. Martin had experienced a debilitating stroke. My mother and the Martins would talk about neighborhood news as well as the repairs and other items to be completed. After we left, I asked my mother about them and noted how they looked different, and her response was that they loved each other. When further pressed, mother told me that Mrs. Martin said, "I would rather be with a black man with a white heart than a white man with a black heart." This explanation of her choice and her relationship with her husband seemed to stop my inquiry, even though I must have been aware that the term black was used to describe a negative aspect of the heart. I had noticed the difference in the Martins' skin color, and that they seemed to be different than the norm I knew. I was ignorant of the complexities of their decisions or the factors and social context involved. It was 1945 and I was five years old.

Awareness of racism was not a constant curiosity or theme in my life as a young child, nor was it a priority. At times during my adolescence when I visited family in other areas of Cincinnati and other states, I was aware of disparities in the gathering spaces and public places where I saw white people, African Americans, and other peoples of color. I noticed that jobs often held by African Americans were as gardeners, domestic workers, farm hands. I saw homes that were in neighborhoods with little grass and few trees. All of that I took in, but I do not recall actively questioning those instances like I did when I was five, or as Jalen is doing at age 12. I had become silent, accepting and benefiting from the structural racism of the time. An unconscious behavior I adopted as a teenager in the 1950's was that of the "set aside." I learned to ignore or at least not talk about racial disparity, and if I did, much of what I heard or said was biased and grounded in fears and discrimination.

BECOMING A TEACHER AT AGE 19

As a young woman in the late 1950's I went to a nearby public university to become a teacher. There I encountered more diversity, not only of people, but also of thought, as I observed a new world. Still, I remained committed to the worldview of the themes of individualism, school success, career mobility, and my primary choices were to pursue those goals. In 1960 at age 19, with just two years of college and teacher preparation, I began to teach on a cadet certificate offered by the State of Ohio to accommodate the severe teacher shortage.

My first two years of teaching were completed in the same town where I attended university. I taught during the day and attended classes two nights a week in order to finish my education and achieve full certification. Emphasis on diversity, specifically racial diversity, was not in the curriculum in those years. Although the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had clarified that equal educational

opportunities must be afforded all children and that segregated schools were not constitutional, the teacher-preparation curriculum did not reflect the changes needed to prepare teachers who were, as I was, uninformed in this area.

The issues of race and racism awareness were largely set aside, not only in the area of teacher preparation, but also in my learning pursuits. My themes remained a success orientation and becoming a state-certified teacher. My primary attention to racial awareness was only to be fair in teaching all of my first-grade children, some of whom were African American. This individual focus of racial awareness was actually self-serving; my goals for success and being a good teacher were only peripherally related to understanding implications for noticing and teaching all of the children who were in my classes. I did not focus on including the history and cultural contributions of African Americans in the curricula and classroom conversations.

A significant shift toward recognizing racial awareness was an unintended outcome of my decision to teach in the Cincinnati Public Schools. This decision, based on personal and career advancement, had another, more important benefit. It was movement toward facing the conflict of my own worldview and awareness of others who were racially different with an eye to seeing a broader world.

LEAVING MY COMFORT ZONE

I now had to get out of my comfort zone. I cannot take credit for the decision that resulted in a new developmental task for seeing with another set of eyes; looking back, I now believe it was a gift of God and the Universe. I left the idyllic university town and went to "the city" where my assignment was a large elementary school. All but two of the 1200 students in the school were African American. My work was to teach 27 African American children in the first grade, a task for which I was prepared in knowledge and skills of teaching and learning, yet very much underprepared in the sense of cross-cultural communication and understanding.

This teaching assignment was not yet the end of my mis-education as a white woman, but it was the beginning of a new racial awareness. What did I learn from this experience outside of my comfort zone? I learned that my students were my teachers; that children are children, proximity matters, and learning is not about being comfortable. Learning requires being able to seek and to see other perspectives and to be open to new ways of being and doing.

My learning was grounded in my personal experiences with my students and their families. The families were also my teachers. Two of the children, Carol and Philip, were twins whose parents invited me to a superb dinner at their home. I saw a family gathered around the table, with prayer, inviting me to join their circle of trust. They entrusted me with their children in school, and they welcomed me just as I was, young

and underprepared for the new environment. They wanted to believe I was open in my heart for the task. From them I learned to withhold judgment, to gather information in the moment, and to look into the heart of the matter. I learned to begin seeing others with soft eyes of love, no longer looking largely from a perspective of fear of failure and self-centered focus on success.

There were other children and their parents: Jan, whose father was a doctor; Robert, who in the beginning would not talk in class because he had been told by his parents, probably as a precautionary step to preserve his safety, "Don't talk to white people." There was Alee, who ate his peanut-butter lunch from his shirt pocket because his family did not have bread. I loved the children. I could see them as the precious individual children they were, with diverse gifts, needs, and families. They were open to learning from and loving me. Early in my life I had absorbed the biases and stereotypes common in the environment where I grew up. Now I was beginning to see differently through my human, social interactions with my students, their families, and my colleagues in a new setting.

It was 1962. I was still unaware of the systemic underpinnings of the racialized society in which I lived where race matters so much in the life experiences, opportunities, and social relationships along racial lines. I **did** notice the differences in socioeconomics (including available resources, housing, the city school attendance area patterns), but I did not have any real grasp of the issues. I was noticing some of the results of structural racism that I had not contemplated before, and, intuitively, it made me very uncomfortable. Although I valued learning in this new world, I was not willing to stay out of my comfort zone and take action to confront myself and the realities of racism.

I wish I could say, "I was changed... I stayed and devoted myself and my educational career to changing the systems and teaching my students, all of them, in new ways." I wish I could say I joined in the actions of the Freedom Riders and the Civil Rights Movement devoted to registering African American people to vote or that I walked across the bridge in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, or acted in some other courageous way to join in the movement for recognition of the humanity of all of us, but I didn't. Once again, I ***set aside*** action for racial justice even while gaining new racial awareness.

What else did I learn through this experience? I learned that people are people, we all love our children, and many are open and generous to me as the other. I became more committed to the idea of racial awareness. I began to see through the stereotypes and biases and toward a lens of love, but I "set aside" my newfound awareness, slid back into wearing the "knapsack of white privilege" described by Peggy McIntosh and focusing on individualism and success. I went back to the university to pursue my career and postgraduate education as "a way out" for me, leaving others where they were.

FAST FORWARD: OTHER TEACHERS ALONG THE WAY

One of the lessons I learned from my own upbringing was that education is the key to the way out, the portal toward mobility and access across social divides. It was a guiding principle in my middle years. In the next stages of my life and career development, I moved to a large suburban Maryland school system and became an administrator and later a teacher educator, in both public and private universities. I continued to pursue personal educational goals and believed I was giving back to those from whom I was teaching and learning. My learning came from proximity and experiences with people with whom I worked and shared interests. I learned from those with whom I shared little common background, interests or opinions. In this period, I learned from reading and researching, much like Jalen did in his social studies project. I questioned what I saw and learned from the people I met. Some of the most significant teachers in my new world were different from me and helped me to see with another set of eyes.

In 1968 I met Sharlene, a white woman, raised in economic and religious situations different from my own. She was Jewish and raised Catholic, married at 15 to a lifelong soldier, and deprived of her high school education by parents who believed young women should just get a job and/or marry. In the middle years of her life, she earned her GED, and eventually her undergraduate degree, two masters' degrees, and a Ph.D. She was one of my dearest friends until her death in 2009. What did I learn from her? Pursue the questions with courage. Question biases you learned and that oppressed you as an individual, and go on. Pursue spiritual development as well as professional development and explore the spiritual with an open mind.

I met Marjorie, an African-American physical education teacher, working in the predominantly white school where I was an administrator in 1972. She was the unofficial leader among the faculty, and she did not want to pursue a formal leadership role. We became friends as we proved wrong those faculty members who said she wouldn't like me because I took the place of the previous administrator and because I was a woman. We soon became friends, learning that as much as we were different, we were also alike: both competitive and resistant to authority and control. Later as our friendship deepened, we learned that we grew up in similar families with like values and principles, even though she grew up on a farm in Virginia and I in a small town in Ohio. After 44 years we are still friends and continue to go out together and to talk on the telephone every day. What have I learned from Margie? That each of us must live our own lives, respecting each other and our decisions, hard decisions, about whom you will stand by and how you will stay in close contact even when the conversations are hard. I also learned that we are more alike than we are different!

In 1981 I met Evelyn, who identified herself in most every conversation as the eldest of 15 children. She was a brilliant African American I met while in the doctoral program at a state university. Evelyn was an assertive leader in the group, and it took much persuading by several men who advocated for me to convince her to invite me into her study group. I was struggling with statistics, and, when I was initially reluctant to ask for help, she said, "Trust me." And I did. I later helped her with social exchange theory. In the end, we were the only two in the study group who finished the program. I have on my bookshelf her dissertation, along with the two books she authored and a collection of recipes she collected from her family. Although she is now gone, we were friends for 31 years. Her grandson, Joseph, and I remain in frequent contact. What did Evelyn teach me? She knew who she was and encouraged me to do the same. Her favorite quote was one of Shakespeare's, "This above all: to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man."

LeRoy, a single father with three sons, Sean, Stephen, and Sydney, became my neighbor in 1988. We lived across the court from each other; one day when I was pulling weeds in the front of the row house where I lived, we struck up a conversation. LeRoy was a history professor teaching African American history and French at a nearby university. His early experiences with racism in this country as well as the experience of leaving this country to study and work, later returning to complete his doctoral work, provided me with a source of knowledge beyond anything I had previously encountered. He recommended a list of reading materials beginning with Franklin and Higginbotham's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, as well as many other non-fiction and fiction accounts of the African American experience. Initially, he was curious about the school system where I worked in the Office of Staff Development, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Human Relations because two of his sons were in middle and high school there. He clearly understood the issues of race and the challenges faced by bright young African American men in the school setting. As we became friends, I learned more and more on a personal level about the ways in which race plays a part in our daily lives as well as in teachers' attitudes and perceptions of students. We confronted commonly-held biases that prevent students of color from placement in high-achieving classes when one son was finally placed in a gifted-and-talented class after we questioned the selection processes. In another live encounter with racism, the second of LeRoy's sons was stopped by police while he was driving my car. He had been "noticed" and stopped without cause except for the curiosity of the officer who asked, "What are you doing driving a white woman's car?" He responded, "It is my godmother's car." The police followed him home to our gated community where they watched him come into the house.

Seeing these examples of injustice up close, as I have come to know and love this family, has changed my life. I see myself as part of their family and I see them as my own family. Now Jalen is the next generation. From all of them, I have learned that facing

racism, not setting it aside, but confronting it through learning, measured discourse, and taking action to dismantle it can produce results and hope in this Kairos moment.

In 1990 I met Marvin when we both participated in a workshop on building coalitions among widely diverse groups comprised of a varied range of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and ability/disability. He is a lawyer who founded his own organization for providing training and services on alternative dispute resolution and is highly regarded in the field of mediation and arbitration nationally and internationally. Marvin and his family, as well as his staff, have been steady and strong peaceful warriors, consistently raising questions about the day-to-day systemic racism, especially in the area of conflict resolution. In addition, he has taught at several universities as well as at the Center and presented his model of mediation, which enables parties in conflict to engage in conversations and control their own outcomes. I have learned so much about conflict and conflict resolution from the educational opportunities and the myriad ways in which Marvin stands firmly, courageously, in the struggle for racial justice and encourages others to do the same.

I began working for Teach for America (TFA) in 1992 to support new teachers who entered the cadre of teachers in Baltimore. In that context, I met Yolanda who was teaching in City Schools, and we both were selected to go to Los Angeles for the summer of 1993 to observe and mentor new TFA Corps Members as they prepared for teaching in our city. Yolanda did not stop teaching after two years, as many TFA Corps Members do. She continued her education to earn a master's degree and then a doctorate in Teacher Education, and she continues to teach relevant courses on diversity, family and community engagement, and qualitative research to doctoral students at a prestigious private university. Her primary research area is centered on diversity, families and community, honoring the work of African American fathers and families as well as leadership at the intersection of families and teachers. She is recognized as a content expert in the field and serves on doctoral committees for others seeking degrees in these areas. We talk nearly every day, vacation together, and honor each other's lives and efforts to be evolutionary supporters of new ways to deal with the issues of race embedded in the institutions and lives of those we love: our children, families, communities and efforts dedicated to racial justice. One of the many things I have learned from Yolanda as she has become my mentor is that leadership in the areas of diversity is a protracted effort that must continue. In our institutions, priorities shift and new barriers emerge, often imposed by conservative, and perhaps racist, worldviews. Yet Yolanda keeps on leading thoughtfully, fairly, quietly and firmly, while she also supports and mentors her students and others who also are on the leading edge.

Sandy is both my sister and my friend. I have known her most of my life. Now retired from teaching after 36 years, she is another of the important teachers in my

life. We grew up in the same town, same family, and took the same career path. She, however, did it differently. After completing her degree at a small private college in Kentucky, she went on to teach kindergarten, pursue higher education, become a reading specialist, and later, during a bout with cancer, she pursued and achieved certification to teach children who speak other languages. She loves her children, all of them, with, of course, her own son, Travis at the head of the line. Today she is still volunteering to teach children who are learning to speak, read, and write English. What is it that I have learned from Sandy? She is always open to new learning as well as to working hard. She taught her children, "It's ok to make mistakes. Mistakes help us learn. We can always get a helper." She has the philosophy that we start where we are and that is from the heart. Frequently she says to me, "Follow your heart." She has taught me to accept myself and be gentle with myself because she has always loved me just as I am. What a role model she has been for me, and I don't think she even knows it.

My brother, Emmerson, is another significant lifelong teacher who explains that we were born of the same parents, grew up in the same community, but had very different experiences, seeing from another set of eyes. He is twelve years younger, and many things had changed. He left our hometown in Ohio to attend college in Maryland, where he played basketball and continues to support that university's scholar-athlete program. In his professional life he has modeled integrity in the area of investment management and certified financial planning. He is also a Sixth Dan Black Belt Master in Taekwondo and has found a spiritual place there. He continues to teach Taekwondo and its values and principles of perseverance, courtesy, integrity, self-control and loyalty. Both Erica, his daughter, and his son, Stephen, as well as I, have observed these characteristics as he lives his life. Lessons I have learned from him are that accountability matters and deep love of family is a deciding factor in our "spirited discussions" when we each see from our different sets of eyes.

There are many other teachers I have been privileged to know, from all races, ethnicities, and regions of the world. From each I have learned to look from another set of eyes until I could also see from their points of view and shift to see from my own eyes with more clarity. My teachers have helped me to find new courage.

FINDING NEW COURAGE AND LOVE

In 2005, my 65th birthday was a highlight. I gave myself the gift of attending a retreat related to Parker Palmer's work and his book, *The Courage to Teach*. It was glorious. I found a new way to travel my inner journey within a group of others I could trust as the process was so carefully crafted to provide the safe space I needed to go deeper. It was another new beginning, and in 2006 I met Sally who was already a long-time Courage facilitator when I attended her *Circle of Trust: Living the Questions*. As a white woman from her native south, she understood the

need for "Calling All Colors" (a program she had initiated for children about racial healing) and for listening to other voices. From Sally, I learned that where you are born and grow up could be an advantage. I learned that "diversity begins within," and we can only sow seeds, not force new plants to grow. I began to see that, although I am a teacher, no matter what position I hold or even when I am no longer employed, I can only collaborate with others on their own paths as I encourage others to go deeper in the ways only they can. I was able to ***see*** my soul and role as a teacher, and as a facilitator, come together.

Many times I am absolutely out of my comfort zone! I am becoming more aware of myself and the similarities and differences in our so-called races as well as the history and the disparities we in this country and our institutions have created, dating back to slavery and before when we white immigrants settled on Native American land. In a recent Courage retreat specifically designed to bring together facilitators who were committed to "Living Undivided: Explorations of Race, Identity, Soul and Role," I saw once again how so-called white people and people of color see differently. We were all committed to healing the wounds of racism and living in a more just, loving society. At the same time, we had had many very different experiences and been wounded in different and unequal ways. Many noticed that some of the white people "set aside" personal feelings and spoke with historical or intellectualized thoughts, not expressing feelings of shame, guilt, and fear. It seemed to me that people of color (most of the people of color present in this setting were African American) were able to express their feelings of being oppressed, angry, and impatient, while many white people were not.

Having such a safe space for difficult conversations and dialogue is crucial to the healing that is needed. I am grateful to the facilitators, a team both African American and white, who were skilled in holding the safe space and in designing the retreat. It seems to me that this model was effective for moving forward with racial awareness and enabled each of us as participants to determine how we will move forward to take action for racial justice.

Yes, I see that it is one way, a way of non-violence, to stop racism as Jalen asked in his research. Yet it is not the only way. One of the facilitators asked the question, "Is this way to pursue work for racial justice too soft?" Will it take too long to see results? I see this courage approach as a "developmental stage" to prepare us all, especially many of us who are white, to learn about the history of racism and to listen and speak out in a new language for the cause of racial justice. As Ida B. Wells, cited in *The Monastic Way* in December, 2016, wrote:

The right way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.

In my pursuit of learning more about the systems of racism, I found that there are many conceptualizations of the idea of race, also called human categorization. One view was created by physical anthropologists who advocated for categorizing human beings into four races. Other views in the scientific community include evolutionary biologists and microbiologists, some who propose evidence that there is no biological basis for race. In race and genomics research, there are questions raised about whether race is real. Further, there is a sociological perspective that race is a social construction, and the learned ways of categorizing people in this way can be erased. These and other topics were presented in a PBS documentary series, Race—The Power of an Illusion (http://www.pbs.org/race/). It seems to me that learning about these various theories, the categorizations, and their origins in our history are important aspects for dismantling the structural racism that exists.

My own learning has been a combination of reading, watching documentaries, and traveling, as well as intentionally joining with others in close proximity who are willing to live the questions of race in our racialized society. I am also learning that I benefited from the laws, policies, and practices that we white people have created; that may be the reason why we so often say things like, "What am I to do? That was a long time ago!" Or even, deny my own "set asides" when confronted with choices of individual, personal success and how the existing benefits of whiteness are embedded in the structures that allow people like me to be in the group that has access to better jobs, more money, safe passage on the streets. I am still looking systemic racism in the face, not only intra-personally, but also seeing interpersonal and intergroup differences of perspective. In fact, for me to be able to see new possibilities for deconstructing systems of racial inequality will require me to do more than dialogue with like-minded others. More frequently I am noticing that the confrontation needed is between my public self and my soul or inner self (hopefully with honesty and openness), taking off the masks I have worn to "go public" in conversations with others who may not be like-minded.

That has been one of the purposes of this work, this search for truth about my capacity as a white woman and as a facilitator, to be able to more effectively see and confront racism. My work is in consistently living the questions and learning about my own culture's emphasis on an individual success orientation, as well as seeing and trusting the good will of others to live their own questions; those are the necessary steps for me to become a better facilitator. It cannot be rushed by learning and knowing more, as I am wont to do. I do need to know and question organizations, support movements like Black Lives Matter, and research efforts to take action politically, systemically, and personally. At the same time, we start where we are, and my greater need is to "see" the working of love in the sphere of human life, relationships, and racial justice. That requires seeking and uncovering reality and willingness to see what has been emerging as I review my response to Jalen's social studies research and reflection.

STANDING FIRMLY IN THE GAP WITH JALEN

Unearthing and telling this story has been important in my noticing and naming new meaning in my life. In *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, Margaret Wheatley (2005) suggests that meaning is what motivates people, that service brings joy, and that courage comes from our hearts. Now I am better able to listen and learn; I am more able to keep moving forward and see different perspectives and recognize not only the struggles, but also the joys and the hopes in the journey toward racial justice; and to look to the future: to Jalen and his mother and father and for all who have the courage to continue this particular journey.

Put another way, my work now is about joining the truth/knowledge in my head and the compassion/love in my heart as a process of spiritual and leadership development to have the capacity to stand my ground when the winds of racial injustice swirl about and to rest, trust, and look up when I am in the trough of the wave and the storm is raging, when I feel I can't go on.

But taking what was inspired by Jalen's work and learned from my life teachers, I will go on. I will know that, in the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right if the head is totally wrong. Only through bringing together of head and heart—intelligence and goodness—shall man rise to a fulfillment of his true nature."

I am no longer envisioning retirement as a resting place, but as Harry Belafonte, singer and activist and also an elder, reflected at the Sundance Festival and recorded in the documentary *Sing Your Song* (2011):

> ***I tried to envision playing out the rest of my life almost exclusively devoted to reflection, but there's just too much in the world to be done.***

I know that I have much to do in order to see racism with another set of eyes...and to take action with hope of making a difference. I may still set aside changes I know are necessary, but not for long! As Jalen's father once said to me in a discussion about matters of race, "It is my life."

It is my life, too.

Although I am an elder, I am still defining myself. I am still learning and experiencing life. I am seeing a new world from other perspectives and developing a new world view. I look to a new future of turning to wonder and joy!

This is a Kairos moment and I want to be part of it. I want to be part of Jalen's life and

contribute to the future of all of our children. Yes, all our lives matter, but it is important that we lift up especially the lives of people of color, who have been too long denied the rights all of us were promised in the founding documents of this country. And yes, it is about the lives of white people too, who have responsibility for acknowledging our part in the institution and aftermath of slavery from which we have benefited. Many of us have been uninformed or misinformed of this history in our families, schools, and religious institutions and have remained silent and set aside the tasks of **seeing** and acknowledging our part in the systemic racism that still thrives.

Yes, all of us will go on, hopefully as allies of change, co-creating a world where we all can live and breathe and support efforts to dismantle systemic racism. This is our chance to see with another set of eyes that our very humanity is at the heart of this "new" worldview where we, black and white and all people of color in America, are interconnected with other peoples of the world and that issues of race are at the intersection of other categories of diversity. This is our opportunity to develop another set of eyes so that we might all see and know that we are interconnected and that intersectionality matters. That which affects one of us affects us all.

Sue E. Small, Ed.D., Clinical Associate Professor Emerita at University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), is still teaching, learning, and mentoring other faculty as well as facilitating Circles of Trust for People Embracing Equality and Love at a church in Baltimore. She can be contacted at sue17small@verizon.net. She speaks from her heart to you, her Reader: "In describing Mr. and Mrs. Martin, I used more formal "titles" or names, as I was young and they were more remote. For the children and other "teachers," I used first names to indicate a more familiar and clear relationship. I make this distinction because honoring people by using their formal titles is an act of respect, and in using first names I am suggesting close relationships, not taking familiarity for granted."

Strokes of Clarity: Meeting Myself in My New Normal

By Sandra Sturdivant Merriam

The space between us is real.
The mud between us is messy.
The silence between us is audible.
How then, do we begin to move in the space between us?
To hear our story of self, of other?
To tell the story of self, of other?
To honor the space between us?
To lift the truth between us?

--Sandra S. Merriam

I know the space between us is real. This work of facilitating Circles of Trust® invites me to meet myself again and again, remembering who I am and hearing the voice of commitment that comes out of knowing and trusting the ground on which I stand.

That voice is an inner voice that has developed from long years of friendship and conflict with myself. It speaks to me from multiple vantage points. My home-voice helps

me remember the familiar knowings from childhood and deep family connections. My self-voice reminds me of the tensions and pressures that have formed, and continue to form, the person I am today, and to foster the confidence that has enabled both my intuition and my resilience. And there is one more voice, which so far has no name. This voice creates my sense of adventure and my desire to explore what is ever-changing. It speaks to me about the Who that informs my responses to my passions and renews my energy.

Hearing my own voice is tricky amidst the world's loud voices, loaded with spin, but all of **those** voices were muted for a moment on July 3, 2016. Mopping our hardwood floors at 4:30 in the afternoon while preparing for our family Fourth of July celebration, I had two strokes, one on each side of my brain! The details of that event, at the end of an ordinary day of house cleaning, food preparation, and grocery shopping, are not the story. The story is my subsequent learning curve – the one that came from listening first to what was outside and then, eventually to my own voice from those inner selves that I have come to know over the past twenty-ish years.

I might have missed this voice if my friend Amy had not said something quite important when she came to visit after my hospital stay. Amy is the CEO and founder of YoungStroke, the first and only American advocacy organization formed to specifically address the unmet needs of young adult stroke survivors and their caregivers. Although I am well beyond the age of "young adult," Amy is a friend, and she knew I needed to hear these words: *"You look just like my friend Sandie, everything looks the same. But dear, you have changed in ways you will now begin to discover. May I suggest you keep a journal? That will be the only evidence of the subtle ways you are different from the friend I used to know. We will have to be reacquainted – and it will be fun – an adventure for yourself and all of us who **think** we know you."*

So here I am 90 days later, sitting with the most significant questions I have posed to myself in a very long time:

- What if I choose to live as if there are no questions that must be answered?
- In fact, what if no answers exist for any questions?
- What if the real work of my life is **not** to understand the gap between what is and what could be, but instead is to accept the gap itself, allowing myself the freedom to inhabit and even embrace that gap?

My energy is back. The passion to send that energy in a particular direction is not. There is no draw for me from either side of the gap. I am feeling content to simply spend the remainder of whatever time I have bearing witness to the positive energy released by embracing the paradoxes of an ecosystem that defies judgment.

After my strokes, I took the usual and prudent trip through the medical gauntlet. Many

well-educated and well-intentioned medical professionals gave me their best advice, prognoses, and of course, pharmacology. I would be remiss if I failed to thank each and every one of them. In fact my current deeper understanding of my condition is due to my careful listening to ***their*** objectives for ***my*** treatment.

NO FIXING

One paradox in the gap where I now live daily has to do with what is, to me, a precious principle of facilitating Circle of Trust work: NO FIXING. I am now age 68. The chance that I will somehow attain the physical condition of a 40-year-old is delusional. After three months of looking for why my strokes happened and listening carefully to the outcomes the physicians care most about, I am OK with never knowing why this event happened. I don't need to fix or be fixed. I am ready to do some prudent prevention that my doctors and I agree upon and to get on with living.

Achieving homeostasis is no easy trick under the best of circumstances; at worst, heredity and personality can combine for a disastrous outcome for the patient and the physician. My strokes have driven that home again. My physical challenges over many years have helped me gain some wisdom, as I found that I was not always on the same page, related to outcomes, as the physicians who treated me. Along about age 40, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to ***partner*** with any physician who treated my conditions. The skills of deep listening that I have learned in my work as a Circle of Trust facilitator serve me well, as I recognize these critical skills are not taught in most professions, including medical. So I am learning to craft interactions with my doctors to express the outcomes I hold as most important in ways that create the best chance of my being heard.

The most notable after-effect of my strokes was, and still is to some degree, balance issues, and one of the most impactful learnings came from my physical therapist. I'm a *why* person. He has been more than patient with my *why* questions, and he has explained both the inner and outer sources of physical balance. His explanation, simplified for my comprehension, enabled the first reflective shift that took me out of my search for a fix from the strokes. Balance comes from three sources: information from feet on the ground, from perceptions through the eyes, and from perceptions and responses of the vestibular areas inside the head. My own journaling gave me the insight into what I wanted, maybe needed, to live with my growing realization that I would never again be in my pre-stroke frame of mind, that I might never again be completely balanced. I wondered if I could find a different way to be comfortable with this new unbalanced normal.

So now that I have given up the idea that I need to achieve some sort of balancing act, I want to explore the idea of disequilibrium. What would it mean to never again feel balanced in my approach to this Courage Work I know to be my calling? In what direction would I

send my energy? It felt good to have no answers. That was my first clue, although initially I struggled against that what I was feeling was a lack of energy or even laziness.

A NEW NORMAL

In my experience and training as a teacher, I had learned Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development as a way of helping students with the process of learning. All of us experience disequilibrium when we get information that does not match what we have established as normal, the way our culture says it **should** be. In a learning setting, disequilibrium creates stress. Resolving disequilibrium is desirable to help children avoid or move through periods of discomfort by returning to a state of equilibrium. The return requires new information and the establishment of a new normal.

Now I find myself feeling that **my** new normal is one that is about **NOT** achieving equilibrium. My new desire is to live in a state of **disequilibrium,** and toward that goal, I still require new information as well as a new vantage point from which to integrate the information from those inner voices. I feel fortunate that part of my new normal continues to be following my calling to serve as a facilitator of Circles of Trust. As I begin to experience my own inner voices I am coming to understand that this new image of disequilibrium is also changing the way I facilitate.

Part of my new normal is that the space I imagine for retreat participants must embody my commitment to my own congruence in order to avoid the lack of authenticity I often experienced in those "share or die" spaces from the 60's. Back in those days of the 60's, as a young adult, I would have ongoing conversations about right and wrong with a close childhood friend who is a Jesuit priest. He seemed to have the clarity I lacked as he would note my inability to choose sides in personal and political conversations. One morning he gave me this admonition, *"Sandra, the whole point of keeping an open mind is to close it on something solid."* Listening for this purpose comes up in my thinking now from time to time, and yet I still find myself moving toward some kind of neutral space, a space between, rather than something solid! I want to stand in some middle space. I want to understand every dimension of the spaces in which I stand. Now after many years and two strokes, I find myself questioning the efficacy of my friend's advice for my life.

FIERCE MOMENTS OF CLARITY

One of my favorite book titles this year is L.M. Browning's *Fierce Moments of Clarity*. I know I have had a few of those moments. They push on me in erratic ways that challenge the notion that life is about finding equilibrium. They pick at the idea that equilibrium will give me control and fly in the face of the belief that if I'm in control, my worst fears will never be realized or lived. My energy in these moments of challenge and surprise helps me see the possibility that I might be fully active in a different reality, one that resembles the scientific idea of potential energy… A space charged

by noticing and affirming the reality around me, by understanding the elements that support equilibrium without equilibrium becoming the goal.

And so I go back to that valuable information from my physical therapist, Rich, regarding the three areas from which my body gathers information about *where I am.* My body is trying to stay upright, to somehow keep me safe, and allow me to move through space without bumping into things and causing injury. This new space I have discovered, with his help, is the place where the objective of having three areas of information-gathering is not equilibrium but rather the creation of a neutral zone, a zone of potential energy – one that allows observation without judgment.

My most important awareness in this space is that I am at my best as a person **and** in my role as a facilitator when I keep myself from applying my story to someone else's life. As a facilitator and trustee of Circles of Trust, I engage in the rebellious act of giving up the either/or thinking that is prevalent in our culture. This allows me to understand that authentic growth comes from holding paradox, requiring that I take responsibility for my energy in the world, and that I focus on the ground on which I stand. Only then do I have the possibility of finding my voice in a way that others are able to hear as authentic and hopeful.

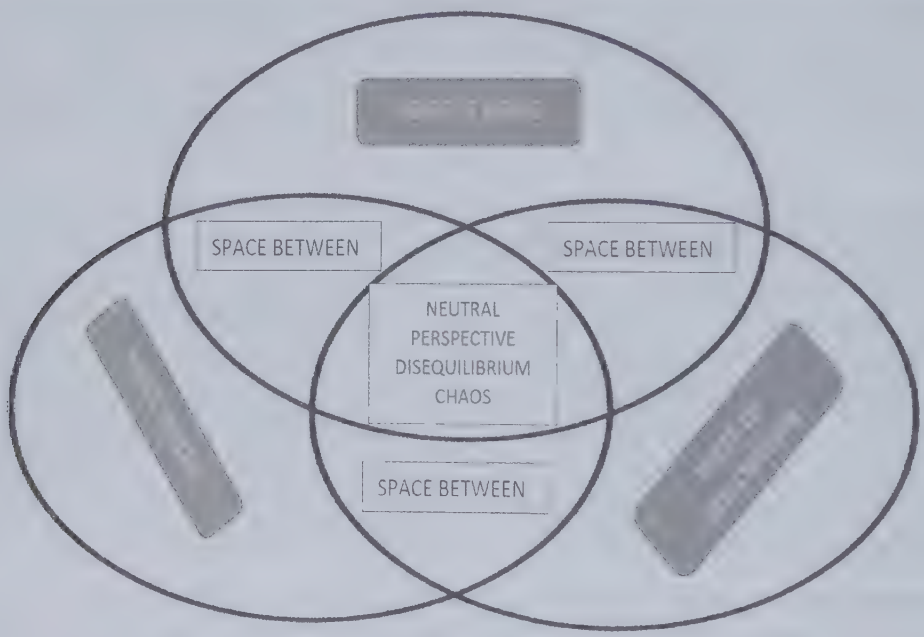
I am retired now and fully aware that the challenges I faced while an "in-service" teacher have grown even more complex. In my new normal, I feel the energy to continue to work with teachers and educational professionals who live in that ever-widening gap that I have struggled to name for more than 20 years. I am understanding that my work is in a space between the energy flowing to a world in need and the energy coming back to me. This is a sacred space and is in need of the quiet energy of witnessing and steadfast listening. In order to be of use, I want to give witness to the power of paradox, while continuing to monitor my desire to resist the notion that I must regain my equilibrium. Even now I have to catch myself, to stop the relentless feeling that I must address my energy to what is yet unresolved, in myself, in those I love, and in the world.

Creating space to bring educators together has always been important to me, and paradox has always been a central part of that space. I realize now that my energy in these spaces is different after my strokes, or maybe, as my friend Amy suggested, I am different. I think I felt the tension of the space as anticipation for ... I am not sure of what. Maybe I was holding hope for buy-in or acceptance. It could be that I was wearing a "pleaser hat" – that would certainly have been in my wheel-house. I feel a bit of the letting go of gain and success, and although I never thought those were factors in my preparation, this newest humbling of my own spirit and the shift away from the equilibrium in my own head lets me know something was creating that former tension.

Now as I move to create these spaces for educators in these weeks after my strokes, I know that my own energy has shifted. The tension is different – more like focus than

tension. Being in this space-between gives me the energy to ask hard questions... And the hard questions give me the energy to create a new narrative about what I mean when I stop searching for equilibrium and claim my reality that living is not about balance. Instead, I am free to consider my story, and the story of anyone else, as Truth. I am free to care about a reality (Truth with a capital "T"!) co-created by our individual and collective truths (with a small "t"!).

The diagram below came to me as I have been journaling about this idea. In this reflective space, the Voice of Home, Voice of Self, and Voice of Exploration name three overlapping circles. The middle of the overlapping space creates a neutral place of observation and perspective where disequilibrium is welcome and surrounded by the space-between. This space-between welcomes stories of self and other, not for the purpose of examination and judgment, but to hold the disequilibrium that emerges when



I can honor the tension of a neutral space safe enough for me to be still and allow truth to be practiced. It is a slow space.

The reality of pushing my physical body to regain my ability to stand and move around safely is also a slow space, one that requires a deliberate set of intentional activities. I am confident I will eventually notice that I am safer and trust myself more, but now it is hard some days. Rich's constant mantra is clear: "*Movement that is slow creates more strength than fast, uncontrolled movement – NO POINTS FOR SPEED!*" I always think to myself that these are wise words, and yet I still need the reminders.

THE COURAGE TO TEACH

Twenty years ago, when I participated in The Courage to Teach®, long before I decided to become a facilitator of this work, I was increasingly aware that the profession I was passionate about had become polarized and contentious. I wrote a poem at that time to describe the polarization and to ask some questions about how to create an atmosphere of respect among teachers and other educational professionals.

The No Child Left Behind Act went into effect in 2002 and, like a virus, changed the culture of education: objectivist thinking spread with the predictable outcomes of one-right-way scripted classrooms and teacher competition for test scores and a seat at the decision-making table. Everyone was under enormous pressure. Colleagues seemed to feel comfortable sharing their truths with me and responded in a positive way to my desire that we all speak professionally to the decisions that fostered pressure for teacher and students. I remember thinking, even then, that my responsibility to behave with consistent congruence to the Courage to Teach principles meant that when I sat with other professionals, I insisted we practice deep listening and respect the Boundary Markers from our Courage Work.

Now, as I live into my new normal, I find some lines in that 20-year-old poem speaking to me:

The space between us is real.
The mud between us is messy.
The silence between us is audible.
How then, do we begin to move in the space between us?
To hear our story of self, of other?
To tell the story of self, of other?
To honor the space between us?
To lift the truth between us?

These words from that old poem haunt me as I am constantly trying to parse the sentiment that would embody what my truth is now. These lines feel like the map for living my new normal of an unbalanced life, and I am amused and informed by the notion that I wrote this poem so long ago. I learn from it as if someone else were its author.

And now, I have a glimpse of my own meaning, new clarity from my strokes. I hope for an even deeper connection, as I continue my journaling and my getting reacquainted with myself, especially that voice I thought had no name but seems to have become the Voice of Exploration in my diagram!

Sandra Sturdivant Merriam (Sandie) was a member of the pilot Courage to Teach® on the South Carolina coast from 1996-1998. Since that time, she has known that she wanted to use Courage Work to help teachers hear their own voices, holding space for them to find a hopeful voice from a new vantage point. She can be reached at sandiemerriam@gmail.com

Wanna' Know How to Cope with Climate Change? Start with Changing Yourself

By Mardi Tindal

On a gorgeously sunny weekend in the late summer of 2012, I was enroute to a friend's cottage north of Toronto with my husband and two other friends. My term as the elected leader of Canada's largest Protestant denomination had ended just a few days earlier, and I was looking forward to some R&R.

It was a strange feeling to have a whole weekend stretching ahead with no commitments. I'd spent three years at a breakneck pace and the prospect of enjoying some expansive, unscheduled time was both thrilling and, in a way, unnerving.

As our destination neared, my husband signaled for our final left turn and stopped to wait for oncoming traffic. A young man (possibly distracted by the two young women beside him) promptly ploughed his pickup truck into the back of our mid-sized passenger car, crumpling it beyond repair.

An obvious metaphor! But of what?

One of the meanings I've taken from this incident over the years is the challenge of speaking truthfully about what's really going on inside us. As the four of us shook pebbles of shattered safety glass out of our hair and assessed the seemingly miraculous fact that none of us had any visible injuries, we assured each other: "I'm fine. Yes, I'm fine."

But we weren't, of course.

We were in shock. And while we were without serious injury, we would discover many new muscular aches and pains in the weeks ahead. My husband particularly suffered, perhaps because he had glanced in his rear view mirror, seen the truck bearing down on us and, unlike the rest of us, stiffened in anticipation of impact. It took several months of physiotherapy before he felt fully restored. But on that sunny morning, he was as confident as any of us in claiming: "I'm fine. Really, I'm fine."

On a different scale, I was just as bad.

I had thoroughly enjoyed my time in office as Moderator of the United Church of Canada. An extrovert, I thrived on interaction and engagement. Meeting people in church halls, facilitating workshops, presiding at sessions of the church's legislative council, giving media interviews – all of this was a joy to me. Then it ended as abruptly as, say, a rear-end collision. "I'm fine," I said. "Really, I'm fine."

But I wasn't. I was already grieving the loss of the meaningful work and purposeful activity that had defined me for three years. I was wondering how much (if anything) I'd really accomplished. And I was deeply exhausted.

Looking back, I blame Parker Palmer for most of it....

In the United Church of Canada, one doesn't "run" for the position of Moderator. Anyone who wanted the job badly enough to campaign for it would be deemed unfit. Instead, one allows one's name to stand in nomination, and then – apart from a short printed statement and a five minute speech -- keeps quiet until the election.

I'd been asked to let my name stand in the past and had always said no. But by the fall of 2008, a couple of things had come together.

One was the growing urgency of encouraging faith communities to become more actively involved in reducing greenhouse gases. True, in 2008, there were many people who still questioned the *science*, but I'd already become convinced it was more a matter for the *heart*. Climate scientists told me many times: "We can't persuade

people with facts alone. We need your help."

The other was the fact that, after years of participating in Courage to Lead retreats, I had reached a point of no return about "going public." I didn't particularly look forward to public engagement on a controversial issue. I knew it could lead to my being attacked or ridiculed (which it did). But the Courage Work had taken hold in me to such an extent that I couldn't avoid it. If I were to live with integrity, then I had to bring my concern for climate change to offering myself for the role of Moderator.

And so I stood with seven other candidates before the church's General Council and, in my five minutes, I told them that climate change was the greatest moral challenge of our generation. And I proposed that when human beings take an "abundance approach" rather than a "scarcity approach," we can generate the hope to meet this challenge, together.

They elected me anyway.

"Community not only creates abundance, community *is* abundance," says Parker, and these words accompanied me throughout my national and international travels as Moderator, and in "town halls" across the country.

I've learned that when our hearts embrace the truth that abundance is found in community, inner climate change becomes the most powerful resource by which to address outer climate change. And when our understanding of community extends to the whole human community, we gain an even deeper appreciation for our abundant relationships and potential.

There were many opportunities for me to advance this perspective. I attended the United Nations' 2009 COP15 climate change talks in Copenhagen, Denmark, and 2011 COP17 in Durban, South Africa, and was bemused to find myself as the only North American church leader present. I was invited to participate in news conferences and issue statements with other global religious leaders of such stature as Archbishop Desmond Tutu. My words found their way into national and international newspapers on numerous occasions, and more frequently in regional news outlets at home as I traveled the country. I was told that I'd become both a symbol of hope, and a threat, a thorn in the side of our federal government which, at the time, was muzzling climate scientists and blocking constructive global action. I could neither remain silent about that obstruction, nor could I behave in any way other than respectfully, given our practices of Courage and Renewal.

Parker Palmer's language in *Healing the Heart of Democracy* gave me a framework

that sustained me both in the exhilaration of becoming (in the Andy Warhol sense) famous, and in standing firm against the personal attacks my advocacy attracted. I found his Habits of the Heart especially useful in helping me resist the temptation to demonize my critics:

- An understanding that we are all in this together;
- An appreciation of the value of "otherness";
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
- A sense of personal voice and agency;
- A capacity to create community.

These remind me, in a particular way, of the story about the blind men examining an elephant. In one version of the story, six blind men are asked to determine what an elephant looks like by feeling different parts of the elephant's body. The blind man who feels a leg says the elephant is like a pillar; the one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope; the one who feels the trunk says the elephant is like a tree branch; and so on. Each one has felt only his part of the elephant and presents these fragments – true, but utterly misleading – as if they were the whole.

The five habits remind me of this story because it is precisely the opposite. Each of Parker's habits is itself a glimpse of wholeness. They do not contradict each other; they amplify. If we could not value "the other," for example, how could we understand that we are all in this together? If we had no sense of personal voice and agency, what would we have to offer to the creation of community? If we could not hold tension in life-giving ways, how could we see that "the other" has value?

Where the blind men see only fragments, Parker sees only different aspects of wholeness.

When my term as Moderator ended, I returned to facilitating Courage & Renewal retreats, accepted an invitation to be a national magazine columnist, and wondered about other next steps of engagement. But without a formal leadership role, I began to feel disoriented and restless about what more I might do. That's the other way in which, on that August morning when a distracted driver rear-ended our vacation, I was not "all right." I had to find a new way to speak and act with integrity.

In the midst of this struggle, I received Sally Z. Hare's invitation to become a Kirkridge Courage Fellow. At our first gathering, in January, 2015, I heard myself sounding very tentative about the work that was life-giving for me, my ongoing passion for co-creating a livable planet. My hesitation was so pronounced that in response I declared to the circle, "I'm not dead yet!"

In his book, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*, Parker Palmer writes about "the temptation to think of ourselves as irrelevant, powerless and utterly mundane." Without a given role, I was beginning to fall into that temptation. He goes on to say, *"On the surface, the temptations of the strong ego and the weak ego seem quite contrary to one another. But paradoxically, their origins and outcomes are the same. Both destroy our capacity for right action because both proceed from the same mistaken premise: the assumption that effective action requires us to be relevant, powerful, and spectacular, that only by being so can we have a real impact on the world."*

As embarrassing as it is to admit, I had fallen into the assumption that I somehow needed to be "relevant, powerful and spectacular" to continue with "right action." The Fellowship gave me an opportunity to rediscover my capacity for good work without organizational standing, as I eased into retirement. Just as our principles and practices had readied me to respond with integrity in the past, being in the company of seasoned facilitators would ready me for new circumstances.

Thanks to the trustworthy questions offered to me by the Fellows, I knew how to respond when I received an invitation to lead the United Church of Canada's delegation to the COP21 Climate talks in Paris. I knew in my heart that it was "right work" for me to accept, as an elder of the church.

The challenge was to discern how I would do it in a new way. Elizabeth May, Member of Parliament, and Leader of the Green Party of Canada and a veteran of these talks, says a global UN climate change meeting "is a lot like going through a car wash without the car"! Without the Moderator's preaching stole, a symbol of leadership, I would don instead the role of mentor and guide to the young adult activist and the elder from the Haida First Nation who accompanied me. I could shield my first-time companions from some of the buffeting and help them bring their distinctive voices to the gathering.

It was January 2016 before I'd had a chance to catch my breath after Paris and I was starting to wonder again about what, if anything, I might do now that the talks were over. I had written thank you notes to our Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, commending them for the courage it took to listen to us at the talks, and take our advice about what will now be difficult commitments to sell to many voters. I secretly hoped that they'd tell me what I could do to help. Our new federal Minister of Science was kind enough to tell me that I'd made a big difference in the progress to date, but there was no clear invitation to play a role from here. And why should there be?

I was slipping back into my own scarcity thinking, "the temptation to think of myself as irrelevant, powerless and utterly mundane." I was thinking, as I went off to another Fellows retreat, that my capacity for "right action" had dissolved.

Perched on the mountain and buried under a record January snowfall which grew higher by the minute, a number of us cozied up around a toasty wood stove. One of the resource people we'd been expecting was unable to get to us through the snow, so our leader asked if I would share something about the climate talks. As it turned out, this was the first chance I'd had to speak of my experiences in Paris, and I was grateful that it came in such a setting. Our Fellows had by now developed a mature level of trust amongst each other, and this invitation represented an opportunity to go deeper, to reconnect my soul's truth with the significance of those talks, and to think further about the inner climate change that would determine right work from here. I was surprised to hear myself humming, and then singing the chorus of a favorite hymn as I began this impromptu presentation:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears
for the dawn draws near
and the world is about to turn

My Soul Cries, also known as The Canticle of the Turning, is sung to a stirring traditional Irish melody. I sang what I knew to be true: that I had witnessed the world turning, the fires of justice burning, and great momentum growing in a movement of which we are all part. And that movement is turning the world.

I spoke about how Courage Principles and Practices had guided my approach and contributions to the talks. In daily briefings with the Canadian negotiators, for example, we grew to understand that we truly were "all in this together." In consulting broadly with others in the civil society sector, we learned to value the other. Each of us spoke with our own voice, and in the speaking, helped to forge community.

At earlier talks, nations of the Global South had argued that the nations of the Global North had caused climate change and benefited from the dirty economy; therefore it was solely up to them to change. It's an understandable perspective, but if the most catastrophic climate change is to be averted, both North and South together will need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Emerging economies cannot rely on fossil fuels for development. This seemingly intractable issue was resolved creatively. Northern nations will provide significant help to meet the challenge of adapting to the ravages of climate change in the South, and will support pre-industrial economies to leap-frog

to clean energy. Nations in the South will do their share, and all nations will abide by transparent mechanisms to track action. It was a remarkable demonstration of holding the tension in life-giving ways.

As I told the Fellows about these things, it became clearer to me how important it is that we go public with what Courage and Renewal can offer to the healing of the planet. We create the conditions for inner climate change which are critical for addressing outer climate change.

All of us have a stake in this. A democratic government will risk only what its voters support, so citizens will need to actively support positive risk-taking, and challenge their elected officials when they retreat from their "better angels." Political capital will be risked, and courage must be rewarded. We must guard our own integrity, and resist the temptation to withdraw our support when decisions require our personal sacrifice.

I shared with the Kirkridge Fellows words from Sanjay Khan, the futurist-in-residence at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In an article for the United Church Observer, he lands on the primary importance of small circles in local communities:

> *I doubt that hope and opportunity will arise from social protest; traditional rabble-rousing is unlikely to prompt a response from business and government that's commensurate with the scale of the coming changes. Rather, I anticipate our best source of hope for adapting to the future will be in the quiet and determined resolve of communities to organize around exigencies we're likely to face — independently of, and together with, business, government and not-for-profits.*

The quiet and determined resolve of communities is the strongest lever in the turning that I see. As a community of practice, courage facilitators who "go public" offer transformative work on the ground. Individuals in our retreats hear their own heartsongs and choose to live with greater integrity between their inner change and the outer changes they seek.

I also shared with the Fellows the story of Yeb Saño. In the two months preceding the talks, he and his fellow pilgrims took enough steps, enroute to Paris, to circle the globe seven times. They became a resilient traveling community, calling upon ordinary citizens and national leaders to be people of hope, on every continent. Two years earlier, as head of the Philippine delegation at the COP talks in Warsaw, Saño had broken down in tears of sorrow as he addressed the global forum. Hurricane Haiyan, whose ferocity was likely amplified by climate change, had just clobbered his homeland. When his words were not enough, he invited a global movement of citizens to join him in walking, talking, and engaging in heart-deep practices that would call leaders

to their better selves. His witness, and that of those who joined him, made a palpable difference to global leaders. Christiana Figueres, the then-Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), responded with tears of joy when the pilgrims presented her with petitions from citizens around the world, as the Paris talks began. She affirmed the importance - spiritual and material - of ordinary citizens offering their solidarity.

When, after sharing some of these stories, I invited the Kirkridge Fellows to complete the sentence, "I wonder…." I was moved by their wisdom. Here's some of what they said:

I wonder how to honor traditional and indigenous knowledge in visible ways in our work.

I wonder about other opportunities we may have for dialogue with our governments.

I wonder how we can help affect the shift from power to partnership, from mastery to mystery.

I wonder about the nature of the scope of the shift we're in. There is a spiritual movement behind everything, and I wonder about the collective life-force that is coming through us in Courage Circles, and about what we bring to the collective soul.

I wonder what would happen if we listened to the depth of the grief in all of us.

I wonder about how my individual soul is inseparable from the soul of this planet, how our culture of individualism poisons and disconnects from the biosphere, and how that's killing us. How can we broaden our circle and not diminish soul-safety?

In the months after that conversation I had another opportunity to work with Parker's Habits of the Heart when, with Dan Hines who is another Fellow, I led a circle titled *The Politics of the Open Hearted: Courage and Climate Change*. Over the course of a week at the beautiful Sorrento Centre in British Columbia, Canada, we took one habit as each day's theme. There is a sense in which, as we came to realize, we are all in shock from the threat climate change poses to our world, perhaps especially those of us who have seen it coming. But we are learning to speak the truth, and helping others do the same. We are no longer in denial saying: "I'm fine. Really, I'm fine."

My own need to practice a non-violent vocabulary about climate change has become clearer. I am learning how it feels very different to speak about "climate health" and "climate peace" more than "climate disaster" and "climate justice." The latter terms

have often sounded hyper-charged, antagonistic, and out-of-sync with reality to me. So now I'm exploring language that can better motivate us toward a low-carbon society, and I share news of hope-filled change wherever it's to be found. What words are more likely to bring us into a creative, dynamic, and organic relationship with one another, with other beings? Which contribute to a more whole-hearted reconnecting?

In order to stay true to my best contributions for this stage of my life - and support others in theirs, I'm inviting old and newer friends into fresh conversation. Plans that my husband and I are making to live communally are reinvigorating, as one way for us to live with greater integrity and within the limits of Earth's resources.

Listening, speaking and facilitating as an elder, and resisting thoughts that the only kind of "right work" for me is the over-active kind, provide me with a guideline. I will continue to encourage and accompany others, including those elected to public office, without pursuing such an office.

When I was invited by my Member of Parliament to help him "set the tone and context" for a Town Hall about Climate Change in our neighborhood, I knew it would be a tough room. However, I also now knew what my "right work" would be. I had witnessed a similar climate change forum in another part of the city, so I knew some of the activists who would arrive without much interest in developing an appreciation for "the other" or "holding tensions in life-giving ways." I had reason to believe that there would be plenty of anger hurled toward government, but would there be enough humility for something constructive to be born of the encounter? I would describe the change of heart and the corresponding practices that would get us where we needed to go, as community.

In part, I said: *My granddaughter is 3 years old. By the time she's the age of her Dad, we will need to be living in a decarbonized economy, a society that can continue to sustain life.*

Getting there requires a combination of humility and chutzpah from us all. I hope that's what each of us will bring tonight - both the humility to listen to those with whom we disagree and the chutzpah to present our strong views.

I hope we will challenge our government to fulfill the commitments it made in Paris, and support it when taking steps to do so.

Because we're all in this together.

I then witnessed 200 people, with varied views, have a civil, constructive conversation.

It appeared to be deeply heartening for us all, including our Member of Parliament.

Going public in new and different ways such as this will continue to be "right work" for me, thanks to the community of mature practice and support reflected in our Kirkridge Courage Fellowship. We're each on a long road of taking Courage and Renewal to places that call to us to bring our best for the sake of our healing and uncovering our hidden wholeness. Our work is slow and steady. It won't be done before we are, but the movement will continue to pick up speed.

As Desmond Tutu once said: *"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."*

Practices of Courage and Renewal are starting to overwhelm the world.

Mardi Tindal is a writer, presenter and facilitator, and a past Moderator of The United Church of Canada. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, with her husband Douglas Tindal and delights in being the mother of two adult sons and daughters-in-law and in being a grandmother. She can be contacted through email: mardi.tindal@gmail.com

SECTION 2

Seeking the Courage to Live in A Community of Strangers

Community does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other. It is not about the presence of other people – it is about being fully open to the reality of relationship, whether or not we are alone.

--Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

Insight From Parker J. Palmer

13 Ways of Looking at Community
(...with a 14th thrown in for free)

- Whether we know it or not, like it or not, honor it or not, we are embedded in community. Whether we think of ourselves as biological creatures or spiritual beings or both, the truth remains—we were created in and for a complex ecology of relatedness, and without it we wither and die. This simple fact has a critical implication: community is not a goal to be achieved, but a gift to be received. When we treat community as a product that we must manufacture instead of as a gift we have been given, it will elude us eternally. When we try to "make community happen," driven by desire, design, and determination—places within us where the ego often lurks—we can make a good guess at the outcome: we will exhaust ourselves and alienate each other, snapping the connections we yearn for. Too many relationships have been diminished or destroyed by a drive toward "community-building," which evokes a grasping that is the opposite of what we need to do; relax into our created condition and receive the gift we have been given.

- Of course, in our culture—a culture premised on the notion that we must manufacture whatever we want or need—learning to relax and receive a gift requires hard work! But the work of becoming receptive is quite unlike the external work of building communal structures, or gathering endlessly to "share" and "solve problems": receptivity involves inner work. Community begins not externally but in the recesses of the human heart. Long before community can be manifest in outward relationship, it must be present in the individual as a "capacity for connectedness"—a capacity to resist the forces of disconnection with which our culture and our psyches are riddled; forces with names like narcissism, egotism, jealousy, competition, empire-building, nationalism, and related forms of madness in which psychopathology and political pathology become powerfully intertwined.

- We cultivate a capacity for connectedness through contemplation. By this I do not necessarily mean sitting cross-legged and chanting a mantra, though that may work for some. By contemplation I mean any way one has of penetrating the illusion of separateness and touching the reality of interdependence. In my life, the deepest forms of contemplation have been failure, suffering, and loss. When I flourish, it is easy to maintain the

illusion of separateness, easy to imagine that I alone am responsible for my good fortune. But when I fall, I see a secret hidden in plain sight: I need other people for comfort, encouragement, and support, and for criticism, challenge, and collaboration. The self-sufficiency I feel in success is a mirage. I need community—and, if I open my heart, I have it.

- The most common connotation for the word "community" in our culture is "intimacy," but this is a trap. When community is reduced to intimacy, our world shrinks to a vanishing point: with how many people can one be genuinely intimate in a lifetime? My concept of community must be capacious enough to embrace everything from my relations to strangers I will never meet (e.g. the poor around the world to whom I am accountable), to people with whom I share local resources and must learn to get along (e.g. immediate neighbors), to people I am related to for the purpose of getting a job done (e.g. coworkers and colleagues). Intimacy is neither possible nor necessary across this entire range of relationships. But the capacity for connectedness is both possible and necessary if we are to inhabit the larger, and truer, community of our lives.

- The concept of community must embrace even those we perceive as "the enemy." In 1974, I set off on a fourteen-year journey of living in intentional communities. By 1975, I had come up with my definition of community: "Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives." By 1976, I had come up with my corollary to that definition: "And when that person moves away, someone else arises immediately to take his or her place." The reason is simple: relationships in community are so close and so intense that it is easy for us to project onto another person that which we cannot abide in ourselves. As long as I am there, the person I least want to live with will be there as well: in the immortal words of Pogo, "We has met the enemy and it is us." That knowledge is one of the difficult but redeeming gifts community has to offer.

- Hard experiences—such as meeting the enemy within, or dealing with the conflict and betrayal that are an inevitable part of living closely with others—are not the death knell of community; they are the gateway into the real thing. But we will never walk through that gate if we cling to a romantic image of community as the Garden of Eden. After the first flush of romance, community is less like a garden and more like a crucible. One stays in the crucible only if one is committed to being refined by fire. If we seek community merely to be happy, the seeking will end at the gate. If we

want community to confront the unhappiness we carry within ourselves, the experiment may go on, and happiness—or better, a sense of at-homeness—may be its paradoxical outcome.

- It is tempting to think of hierarchy and community as opposites, as one more "either-or." But in mass society, with its inevitable complex organizations, our challenge is to think "both-and," to find ways of inviting the gift of community within those hierarchical structures. I am not proposing the transformation of bureaucracies into communities, which I regard as an impossible dream. I am proposing "pockets of possibility" within bureaucratic structures, places where people can live and work differently than the way dictated by the organization chart. The most creative of our institutions already do this; e.g., those high-tech companies that must organize efficiently to protect the bottom line and get the product out the door, but must also create spaces where people can collaborate in dreaming, playing, thinking wild thoughts, and taking outrageous risks, lest tomorrow's product never be imagined.

- Contrary to popular opinion, community requires leadership, and it requires more leadership, not less, than bureaucracies. A hierarchical organization, with its well-defined roles, rules, and relationships, is better able to operate on automatic pilot than is a community, with its chaotic and unpredictable energy field. But leadership for community is not exercised through power (i.e. through the use of sanctions) that is the primary tool of bureaucratic leadership. Leadership for community requires authority, a form of power that is freely granted to the leader by his or her followers. Authority is granted to people who are perceived as authentic, as authoring their own words and actions rather than proceeding according to some organizational script. So the authority to lead toward community can emerge from anyone in an organization—and it may be more likely to emerge from people who do not hold positional power.

- Leadership for community consists in creating, holding, and guarding a trustworthy space in which human resourcefulness may be evoked. A critical assumption is hidden in that definition—the assumption that people are resourceful. Standard organizational models assume that people have deficits and scarcities rather than resources; people do not want to work, so the organization must surround them with threats; people would not know what to do with the unexpected, so organizational life must be routine; people will try to cheat if given half a chance, so the organization must build walls of security. When we act on the scarcity assumption, it becomes a

self-fulfilling prophecy through a process called resentment (small wonder!), and people are rendered incapable of community, at least temporarily, sometimes permanently.

- Ironically, we often resist leaders who call upon our resourcefulness. We find it threatening when leaders say, "I am not going to tell you how to do this, let alone do it for you, but I am going to create a space in which you can do it for yourselves." Why is that threatening? Because many of us have been persuaded by institutions ranging from educational to industrial to religious that we do not have the resources it takes to do things, or even think things, for ourselves (which, to the extent that we believe it, expands an institution's power over our lives). Many people have been convinced of their own inadequacy, and any leader who wants to invite them into a community of mutual resourcefulness must see this invisible wound and try to heal it.

- Seeing and treating that wound takes courage and tenacity; while the leader is calling followers to fullness, the followers are accusing the leader of not doing his or her job. Every teacher who has tried to create a space for self-sustaining learning community knows this story: students resist on the grounds that "we are not paying tuition to listen to John and Susie talk, but to take notes from you, the person with the Ph.D." It takes a deeply-grounded leader—a leader with a source of identity independent of how popular he or she is with the group being led—to hold a space in which people can discover their resources while those same people resist, angrily accusing the leader of not earning his or her keep.

- In the face of resistance, an ungrounded leader will revert to the bureaucratic model, the teacher will revert to lecturing rather than inviting inquiry, the manager will revert to rule making rather than inviting creativity. In the face of resistance, leaders will do what they are taught to do—not create space for others, but fill the space themselves—fill it with their own words, their own skills, their own deeds, and their own ego. This, of course, is precisely what followers expect from leaders, and that expectation prolongs the period during which leaders of community must hold the space—hold it in trust until people trust the leader, and themselves, enough to enter it.

- There is a name for what leaders experience during this prolonged period of patient waiting. It is called "suffering" (which is the root meaning for the word "patience"). Suffering is what happens when you see the possibilities in others while they deny those same possibilities in themselves. Suffering is

what happens when you hold in trust a space for community to emerge, but others lack the trust to enter the space and receive the gift. Suffering is what happens while you wait out their resistance, believing that people have more resources than they believe they have. But leaders do not want to suffer. So we create and maintain institutional arrangements that protect leaders from suffering by assuming the worst of the followers and encouraging leaders to dominate them by means of power.

- I have yet to see a seminar in suffering as part of a leadership-training program. I can think of three reasons why. One, we train leaders for bureaucracy rather than community, no matter what we say we are doing. Two, the idea of leadership is still so steeped in machismo that we do not want to acknowledge a "weakness" like suffering. Three, suffering is a spiritual problem, and we want to keep leadership training in the orderly realm of theory and technique, rather than engage in the raw messiness of the human heart.

But leadership for community will always break our hearts. So if we want to lead this way, we must help each other deal with that fact. We might begin by viewing the problem through the lens of paradox, that spiritual way of seeing that turns conventional wisdom upside down. Here, "breaking your heart" (which we normally understand as a destructive process that leaves one's heart in fragments) is reframed as the breaking open of one's heart into larger, more generous forms – a process that goes on and on until the heart is spacious enough to hold a vision of hope and the reality of resistance with tightening like a fist.

If we are willing to embrace the spiritual potential of suffering, then community and leadership, human resourcefulness and the capacity to hold it in trust, will prove to be abundant among us – gifts we have been given from the beginning, but are still learning how to receive.

Parker J. Palmer is a writer, teacher, and activist who works independently on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality, and social change. Founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal, he has authored nine books, including *The Courage to Teach, Let Your Life Speak, A Hidden Wholeness,* and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. He holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley, and thirteen honorary doctorates.

MEETING THE AUTHORS

Joanne Cooper: Teaching, leading Circles of Trust, hanging out with my grandchildren, being in the Fellowship.. these are what make me feel alive, My Work in the world is creating space for others to learn, grow ,and listen to their own inner teacher --- and also, being in true community with others. I have been a Courage & Renewal facilitator for over 10 years. I am a passionate journal keeper, having kept a journal for over 40 years. I want you to know, Readers, that I love my family, my friends and my life – and that writing my story for you has been empowering!

Diane Petteway: *What makes me feel most alive are honest conversations, holding hands with my husband, being "in flow," being with my journal, singing in community, opening night at the theater, the energy of adolescents, mountains, books, and Flair pens. My Work in the world is about creating safe, creative places for the soul; fighting for social justice; gathering stories, sharing music. I have a very shy soul. I wish I could live more "out loudly," like my daddy did. Writing my story to share with you has made me feel like I was claiming a birthright gift, naming truths that had been long dormant.*

Sally Z. Hare: My passions are teaching and learning. What makes me feel alive: walking on the beach; making love; being in nature; being in the Fellowship. I am a passionate reader, which also means I have to climb over the stacks at the bedside to get into bed! I love my e-books too! I have been a Courage & Renewal facilitator for over 20 years, and I am still becoming a facilitator. I have the world's best life, living in a nest, co-created with Jim, that feels a bit like a thin place.

Karen Noordhoff: *Envisioning, creating, and facilitating Courage & Renewal Circles of Trust makes me feel alive... So does conversation with my husband, David, over a glass of wine; being by the Metolius River in central Oregon; time in the Kirkridge Fellowship, and listening to French music and any time in France! I am coming to know that my Work in the world is supporting others as they grow into the deepest core of who they are, and becoming a witness, particularly in Circles of Trust. I value deep listening and try to offer it to others. My middle name is Joyce, which reflects my soul of quiet joy. I tear up easily. Although not a Facebook person, I'm invested in my family and friends, making deep friendships. I am a serious Francophile and love the language, although I don't speak it well or fluently.*

Carol Kortsch: I like to be called by my name, Carol - Song of Joy. Here's what makes me feel alive: wilderness solitude, dirt under my nails, the drumming of pileated woodpeckers, 45 years of canoe trips with my man, dancing to an African beat. I know my Work: it is to stop, look, and listen – together. I relish creating safe and challenging communal circles that bring us home to ourselves and our wildest connections in earth. Writing from the heart of our circle has reminded me how essential it is to creatively tell my story in words and images. I will keep writing from this fresh beginning!

Veta Goler: *I'm most alive when I'm moving. That could mean I'm moving my body, as in walking my dog in nature, walking a labyrinth, drawing or coloring, or dancing in the kitchen. It could also mean moving within the terrain of my inner landscape while meditating or chanting. The Beauty I love is accessing and expressing the divine within me and helping others to do the same. My purpose on the planet is to know my divinity, which I do through creativity, spending time in nature, contemplative practices, and listening to and following my intuition.*

Elaine Sullivan: I feel alive when I am listening to stories, playing with my grandchildren, and being in nature. I value quiet and meditation AND connections with friends, family, and colleagues. I am a Seeker. I have spent over 40 years working with written life stories and inviting people to mine the depths of those stories. Yet, even after inviting so many others to write their story, I was surprised by the challenge to write my own for this book! I discovered layers of my inner world that make me even more curious about my soul journey.

Longing and Belonging

By Joanne Cooper

This is the tale of community longed for and found, the story of a fractured life made more whole. It is also the story of my growing understanding of the quality of community, whether in a retreat setting, in academia or in a family situation. What I have found in community is my own hidden wholeness, glimpses of which came from sharing parts of me I've never shared with anyone. And the key to this sharing, wherever it is taking place, is trust.

Every time I tell someone in Oregon that my husband and I split our time between Oregon and Hawaii, they sigh and go, "OHHHH! You are so lucky!" But the truth is that even though Hawaii is a place of beauty and wonder, it is also an isolated place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. In fact, space shuttle photos show it as the most isolated population center on earth. It is roughly 2,400 miles to the closest land mass (California).

Yes, it is beautiful and yes, I have had a dream job there (being a tenured professor). I love my students, my friends, and my church community, but higher education is an island unto itself, a rather cold and lonely place that worships rationality. No one talks about the soul, only the intellect. I found there a lack of conversations that matter, much posturing and little that allows the soul to show up.

In short, higher education can be soul crushing. Alexander and Helen Astin affirm this in their study, *Meaning and Spirituality in the Lives of College Faculty: A Study of Values, Authenticity and Stress* (1999). They found little to feed the spirits of professors. Through a series of interviews, they explored issues of spirituality, authenticity, meaning, wholeness, and self-renewal in higher education. The researchers shared that some faculty wept in their offices when they were interviewed, as research questions gave participants an opportunity to honestly confront the desert in which they worked.

Looking back through my journals, I remember my own feelings. In 2007, I wrote about my life in the university:

> *Yesterday my department chair told me that when the dean's office called to ask who our personnel committee chair was, he said it was me, but that I was too busy to come to the training session. OK, there are several things wrong with this picture. First, not only did he neglect to tell me that I was chairing the committee this year, he didn't even ask me. Second, he neglected to tell me there was a training meeting. I found out because I was in a meeting with the dean, who was heading out the door to attend. Third, he decided without asking me that I didn't need to go to the meeting. So what if I screw up the procedures and my colleagues sue us. No big deal, right?*

LONGING FOR COMMUNITY

Is it any wonder, given these circumstances, that I was longing for a trustworthy community? I tried to construct that kind of community in my classes, carefully creating safe spaces where students could share their thoughts with each other. Even before I moved to Hawaii, I had been teaching a journal-keeping course which also combined reflective writing with honest conversations in small groups, but I figured that my new academic colleagues might think Journal Keeping was too "touchy feely." So when I started teaching in Hawaii, I re-named the seminar *Critical Reflection in Educational Administration* and continued to teach the same reflective journaling courses I had always taught. In these classes I would work to create the kind of community I needed, each semester starting with a new group that would eventually become a place of truth and honesty, where it was safe to laugh, to dig deep, think hard and then articulate those thoughts. These encounters always made my heart sing. One Samoan doctoral student told me she was going to quit the program until she took that course.

I shared Parker Palmer's *The Heart of a Teacher* with students in my courses and longed to experience the *Courage to Teach* retreats he described, but I couldn't because of my isolation in Hawaii. So I was propelled across the Pacific to the Northwest when a sabbatical opened the opportunity to attend two retreats in the

state of Washington. During that sabbatical I felt even more drawn to this work and to the Center for Courage & Renewal.

The Center's philosophy fit hand–and-glove with my love of journal-keeping, and especially my Critical Reflection course. The retreats gave me access to my inner teacher and to the realization that, all my life, I have been trying to create the community for which I longed. At the end of the second retreat, I invited the two facilitators, Terry Chadsey and Yarrow Durbin, to come to Hawaii to lead a retreat. This began a ten-year journey that included my becoming a facilitator and then inviting one of my students to do the same. I offered retreat opportunities to those who were place-bound in Hawaii, serving teachers, college faculty, principals, ministers, nurses, and, of course, students. At one point, we had participants who came from both Los Angeles and Korea in the group, so our community stretched across the Pacific.

Despite its isolation, Hawaii is a place of deep soul-nourishing beauty that gives itself naturally to this work. After my minister attended our year-long retreat series, he told me: "*Joanne, I've been to a lot of retreats in my life, but never anything like this before.*" Another participant, a faculty member who was a former Jesuit priest and grew up on a tiny island in the Pacific, wrote of his retreat experience: *"Thank you so much once again for such a wonderful gift of the weekend. I will forever remain grateful to you for loosening my heart to re-discover all the treasures buried deep within from ancestors past and winged spirits ahead. I can only promise what I am able to do within my control and that is to remain grateful and keep on dialoguing he alo ahe alo* (face-to-face) *with the endless possibilities of fullness ahead..."*

Ironically, it was I who needed my heart loosened and these retreats did just that. The hidden wholeness that Parker Palmer writes about was becoming more evident in my life. My journal allowed me to reflect on my life, then to step back and examine the pieces of this life in privacy and safety. I had written of my higher education experience:

> *I struggle each day in my journal to pick up all the pieces of my life, like the shattered slivers of a mirror that are reflecting my life back to me. Some pieces are jagged and painful to hold. Some are simply too small to handle and some are too big to lift. Together they make up the totality of my existence.*

What I didn't know at the time was that I could go even deeper in that reflection when I was able to share these pieces in a safe and trusting community that would allow me to feel much more whole.

YOU CAN'T GIVE WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE

When I applied for the Kirkridge Fellowship, I wrote in my application that I was isolated in Hawaii and in need of community. I had had a glimpse of this kind of community when I attended a Circle of Trust retreat at Zapata Ranch in Colorado with facilitators Sally Z. Hare and Jeff Creswell. I knew right away that I wanted more. As a very thirsty person, I had only taken a tiny sip of water---totally refreshing and yet just a hint of the possibilities that lay ahead. But the depth of my need and the rich rewards that lay ahead in the many opportunities to be in community with other facilitators were still unknown to me.

The truth is that it was hard for me to think that I deserved this blessing. As a facilitator, I was supposed to be giving retreats, not partaking of them. I was supposed to be giving water, not drinking it myself. But in that first gathering of facilitators at the Kirkridge Retreat Center, I heard others say that they were also questioning their role as a facilitator. Many were not actively offering retreats at that time and were concerned about whether they even met the requirements of the fellowship program.

I wondered how it could be OK to be in retreat and not be leading it myself. I saw others doing this, but I was almost afraid of my hunger for community. I felt like a starving person; if I started eating, I might never stop. And so, I was strangely hesitant. I had a whole state of people back in Hawaii who needed my services. How could I spend my time soaking up the blessings of community for myself? And yet---maybe I could. The truth is we all needed that kind of trusting community, one that allows us to be our true selves and to be accepted for whoever shows up. I was beginning to believe that you can't give what you don't have.

THE CLEARNESS TRIAD: WHERE I COULD SPEAK THE UNSPOKEN

One of the most powerful aspects of these Fellowship retreats was the Clearness Triad. Instead of the traditional Clearness Committee where there was one focus person, we met in the same group of three over three days, and each of us had time as the focus person. The format was the same as for Clearness Committees: deep listening, open and honest questions, taking notes. I found that continuing the process each day with the same people built trust over the course of the retreat, creating a space in which we dared to speak of things in our lives that we had never shared with anyone.

In one retreat, our triad had built a "nest" in a round room, surrounded by windows and a view of the scenic Delaware Water Gap Valley below. We became so engrossed in the process that we lost track of time and missed the group photo. We vowed to get together at the next retreat and make time for this tight, safe community. The next time we found a quiet room and had just started sharing when a guest poet from the retreat

poked his head in the door and said, *"I am so tired. I just need to lie down in a corner and rest. I promise I won't listen or bother you. Please, can I come in?"*

There was a stunned silence. Neither of my dear friends said anything. I felt desperate for some time alone with them and knew it would not be the same with this stranger in the room. I hesitated only a moment and then said, *"I'm sorry. That's not going to work for us."*

Later I heard he complained he could "get no respect" at the retreat, that we had rebuffed him. I felt badly for him, but still glad I had protected our privacy and our community. I was willing to risk being rude to preserve the precious trust we had slowly built. What I found in that community was the ability to share parts of me I'd never shared with anyone. Sharing those pieces meant I could incorporate them into the totality of my being, that I could be more whole. I could welcome parts of me that had been unspeakable, shut off and alone in a tiny corner of my being. This was a huge gift, one I was willing to fend off even requests of guest poets to preserve.

IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH

To attend my last Kirkridge Fellowship retreat, I needed to fly all the way from Honolulu to Newark, New Jersey, and then travel by car to Kirkridge in Pennsylvania. My daughter and her family were visiting us in Hawaii for a week's vacation, and I really wanted time with them, so I booked a red-eye flight that allowed me to see my family and get to the retreat on time. My granddaughters looked stricken when they found out I was leaving the next day and asked, "You mean this is the only night we get to see you?" My daughter and her husband said they were too old to take overnight flights anymore and looked at me like I was crazy. What was I doing? Finally, my daughter looked at me and said, *"You must really want to be there."*

"Yes," I said, feeling heard, understood. This fellowship and this sense of community are so important to me that I am willing to move heaven and earth to be there.

My idea of community extends to my family, which is unraveling. My daughter and son-in-law are in the middle of a divorce, and we are stepping in to care for our grandchildren. We struggle to support both parents as we help our grandchildren make sense of what is happening to them and to their family. The kids' counselor says our job is to help them continue to lead normal lives in the midst of the chaos and pain... Not an easy task.

Loving community, I realize, extends to family as well as to our Kirkridge Fellowship and the university classrooms I oversee. A powerful lesson for me is that everything changes. Just when you have adjusted to a new reality, everything begins to morph. My beautiful grandson, at 14, sprouts up and is suddenly taller

than me. His voice drops as he rises, so that he ends up taller and more deep-throated than my memories of him from just three weeks ago. And I need to remind myself that this is normal. Everything is always in the midst of great change, even as time seems to be standing still.

We often move into our grandchildren's house and take care of them while their parents are out of town. We literally and figuratively hold community for this household that includes a large dog that will eat anything he can find or steal (like the roast off the kitchen counter) and a cat that stays out all night and returns with dead birds in his mouth or rat bites on his paw. All of this is normal but I feel a little like the canvas seat on their outdoor furniture that gave way as I sat down and suddenly I was sitting on the ground!

I am trying to reach my own new normal, juggling Courage work, my university teaching, and my family's great pain. Frequently I ask, "What am I doing here?" I am trying to be glue to a wobbling community, but I feel like I could topple any minute without a little shoring up of my own! What feeds me are the times when I am nourished by my various communities. It is the moments with my grandchildren when we sit and talk after dinner about our dreams, who we want to be when we grow up; the moments in our Kirkridge Fellowship when we are deep in conversation about the things that matter most to us.

TRUST IN COMMUNITY

I recently traveled to the Baltic Capitals and Russia with a group of 15 people. One of the things that was most unsettling was the amount of time we spent in small talk about where we'd been and what we'd seen, about where we were going that day and what we would see (the Estonian capital and its gardens, the towers of the Kremlin and the changing of the guard, etc.). Even though the places were interesting, I ended up thirsty for conversations about things that really matter.

I realized that the essence of trust in a community is what matters. A group of strangers traveling together and making small talk at breakfast each morning is not the same as a community of trust, a group of people willing to create the safe space that allows talk about what really matters. I have been deeply moved by that quality of community in our Circles of Trust, and I can see that trust is the key to any community. Even families come with different levels of trust. If you are getting beaten up every day by someone bigger than you, there is little trust in that family/community.

I remember research I conducted with faculty women in higher education around "Finding a Home in the Academy." When we asked them about the meaning of home, I was surprised by one woman's response that home for her was a dangerous place,

not one of comfort and safety. That gave me pause; I had assumed home meant only positive things. Just so with community... A community can be dangerous, like a gang or cult. The sad thing is that everyone longs for community, some so much that they are willing to join a dangerous pseudo-community rather than having none at all. Some communities take advantage of that longing and our own vulnerability, cults, gangs, even some families.

So I need to qualify what I am saying here. I was longing for a community of trust, whether in a family or in a group of professionals. I think this is what the faculty that wept in their offices were longing for, that kind of trust. Trust is needed to speak your truth, and as Parker Palmer says, trust is needed for the shy soul to show up.

So often we grope our way through our lives, feeling lost both inwardly and outwardly. Mark Nepo says the root of the word lost means to be divided or cut apart, the very opposite of whole. But when we are lost, he says we are "ripe for transformation" (*Seven Thousand Ways to Listen,* p. 41). He tells of a Jewish philosopher who said we are often like someone in the midst of a very dark night, over whom lightning flashes again and again. *"When lightning flashes in our mind or in our heart, we glimpse the hidden order and our changing place in it"* (p.42).

Those flashes will come whether we are alone or with others. But struggling alone as I have for most of my life, often acutely aware of my own confusion and pain, is not nearly as healing as being in the good company of others who are also struggling. Being in community with the Kirkridge Courage Fellows has provided a safe place to share my confusions and struggles. The lightning flashes come brighter and faster in that community, as well as the understanding and acceptance of how lost I sometimes feel, without anyone's trying to fix that condition.

Nepo writes that *"we can only gain strength from sharing our experiences, without second-guessing any of it, just putting what we've been through into the small fire between us that has kept us warm for years."* He tells of two women crossing a frozen lake, who came upon a moose that had fallen through the ice. They could not pull the animal out; so they simply put their tent over him and stayed with him through the night until they could go for help in the morning. This, he says, is a metaphor for how to listen and be with those who have fallen: *"Stay close and keep them warm, resisting the urge to prematurely solve the situation. If nothing can be done, sit with them, and withstand the urge to abandon those who seem stuck. Offer a tent and stay 'til the way out presents itself, not forcing a rescue"* (p.188).

I realize this is what we are now attempting to do with our grandchildren, to stay close and keep them warm until a way forward presents itself. Make no mistake; this kind of encounter is rare and precious and hard work to create. But the work is so very worth it.

I remember the poet who wanted to rest in our room. I realize he did not understand the hugeness of what he was asking us to give up for him. But I did.

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An Invitation to Dance

By Diane Petteway

Dance when you are broken open
Dance, if you've taken the bandage off
Dance in the middle of the fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance when you are perfectly free.
--Rumi

It is the end of August. A new teaching year is just around the bend. Teacher workdays begin tomorrow. Students arrive in a few short days.

Time will fly quickly---many hours of training for a new school initiative, the latest "magic recipe" to ignite student engagement, stimulate critical thinking, prepare students for the 21st century (although we are already sixteen years in) and, of course, to ensure solid performance on End-of-Grade tests next spring. The annual walk-through of policies, the famed Bloodborne Pathogens and Sexual Harassment videos, grade-level meetings, team meetings, department meetings, Individual Educational Plan meetings, mentor meetings, the creation of the Professional Growth plan, setting up gradebooks and attendance rosters---the list of tasks seems endless for my job

of teaching music to middle school students. There will be a few hours, far too few always, to prepare the physical space of my classroom and wrap my head around what really matters to me----my students.

DANCE WHEN YOU ARE BROKEN OPEN

I think about the faces of my students a lot. Their eyes. Their bones and flesh and blood. This is what I dream of. This is what fills me with wonder. Who are they? How can I, with one forty-five-minute class for forty-five days, even scratch the surface of who they are? I spend a lot of time imagining them, individually and collectively. Who will make me crazy? Who will make me laugh? Who will make me weep?

Even those kids that I've known before come back re-formed after the summer, shaped and shifted by extended time with their families, summer camps, new tensions and worries, new fears, new chinks in their adolescent armor, new reasons to hide. And they hide with such feverish intention. They hide behind electronic devices; behind a rush of prattling, excited words, behind their hair and the newest, trendiest clothes and shoes; behind their sagging pants and their just-above-the-dress-code skimpy shorts and spaghetti straps. They hide behind their anger and their nonchalance and their sarcasm.

No matter how desperately they hide, no matter how elaborate their camouflage, I see them. My old eyes are so hungry for their palpable heart beats, for their vulnerable, shy souls.

I see you. That's what I want to say to each of them.

DANCE IN YOUR BLOOD

I know something about hiding. I was born into a working class family in the late 1950s. My daddy was a salesman for Sears Roebuck. My mother stayed home with me, my older sister, and my younger brother. My daddy played in a southern string band with his brother and several other family friends. Every Saturday night, they played around town; bluegrass tunes, country music covers, and music for community square dances. Whenever they jammed at our house, I stood at my daddy's knee, dancing and singing along. Music and dancing were in my blood.

I was five years old when my father was killed in a car accident, coming home from work. Life became different. The music was gone.

My mother, broken and grieving, got a job at a local mill. She moved us to a nearby town where my father's mother and siblings lived. Many evenings and weekends, I

spent the night with my grandma and my aunt. On Sundays, my brother and I would accompany them to the local Pentecostal Holiness church.

My mother, a proud Southern Baptist, did not approve. In my childhood and adolescence, navigating between the Baptist and Pentecostal practices, I learned the harsh realities of racism and cultural bias. Though the demographics of the town were a third African American, a third Native American, and third Caucasian, all of the political and social power was controlled by white citizens and businessmen.

My mother's story was consistent: our family was white. But I knew that my daddy's family---my grandmother and her children---were Lumbee Indian. Native-American blood danced through my veins.

By the time I was the age of my current students, I could effortlessly conceal the truth of my identity. I didn't even have to think about it---whiteness was artfully entrenched. I carried my mother's shame about being Native American, and I loved my daddy and wanted to hold onto his memory.

I learned about racial inequities in public schools. Native-American children were poor, trashy, and worthless. They would never become as good as white people. Although

I didn't know it consciously, I knew on a soul level that I could be discovered as poor, trashy, and worthless, if anyone looked too carefully. So I didn't allow anyone really to know the truth about Diane. I became enculturated into white society, holding close the secret of my tainted blood, never allowing the secret of my heritage to be known.

DANCE, IF YOU'VE TAKEN THE BANDAGE OFF

Watching my students, I see myself.

"If you knew who I am, you would not love me." The familiar ancient whisper of the adolescent. Old habits die hard, and I still keep a safe distance between me and the rest of the world. This will be my last full year of teaching before retirement. Ready access to hundreds of relationships will soon be changing.

Instead of greeting this year with curiosity and wonder, instead of allowing grief for this chapter of my life that is ending, I have been fully immersed in safe tasks... planning my planbook (yes,it's true); writing each date, each holiday, each early release date, each meeting; writing each student's name, alphabetized by their first name since this is how I know them; creating seating charts, sub plans, welcome letters; creating and printing posters. Though none of these tasks speaks to teaching music to middle school students, all of them help manage the chaos of public school teaching.

But none of them addresses other ancient questions that haunt me: Who am I? Right now, at this moment, who am I? Why does this, any of this, matter? My journal entry reflects my state of mind on this first workday:

8/19/16 ***Oh, God,***
As I begin this dance, this year,
Let me be a full part of the narrative.
Let me be open and whole.
Let me see my students, really see them.
Let us be, together.
Let us find and hold, together, what really matters.

In meetings before school begins, as I step into my work with students, in small conversations in the hallways and in teachers' meeting-spaces, I often feel shy and small. I keep conversations and my own vocal investment succinct. My model is the quiet person at the party who, when least expected, speaks one sentence that blows everyone away with its insightful power. Short, sweet and BAM! It doesn't surprise me that this was the wise Native model of my youth, the way that Indians on TV and in movies communicated their message. This is the image I choose for my Native-American voice.

But when I think of the voices of Native Americans in the classrooms of my youth, it saddens me that the true voices of real live Indians were either silent or surly. The Lumbee Diane that I create in my imagination is not the Lumbee that my classmates and their families experienced. The painful truth is that my white privilege allowed me the choice to romanticize my hidden heritage.

DANCE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIGHTING

I think about this issue of voice. Because of the cultural stigma associated with having Native-American blood in a white-dominated culture, I have never, until now, considered the connections between my small voice and the Silent Indian voice that I still love to watch on *Bonanza* reruns.

Difficult questions rumble within me. Does my voice matter? Does what I say really make any difference? Most often, deepest in my soul, I de-value my voice.

I teach voice.

My core belief that each person has a right to their own truth has led me to this

awkward space with my voice. Music is what I do, every day, with a room filled with awkward voices. My students, like me, are so very tentative about their true voices.

Speaking in my own voice requires risking discovery as a fake, an imposter. What if my voice cracks? What if I don't speak in the current "hip" vernacular? What if my voice doesn't match the voices of others—is too loud, too quiet, too nasal? What if my voice is misconstrued, then resurrected to challenge my credibility? What if my words offend someone? And these issues reference only the speaking voice.

What if I sing a note that doesn't match the other notes in the room? What if I accidentally sing when everyone else is silent? What if someone tells me---verbally or nonverbally—that my voice is not contributing to the beauty of the sound and I should "mouth the words" or not participate at all? Does my voice, active and alive, make a difference? These are crucial questions. But the question beneath all of these: am I willing to be vulnerable enough to speak my truth, in my own voice?

Hovering over these questions around voice and vulnerability is the issue of authority. In these millions of minutes spent in August meetings, these are the voices that rise consistently:

"The district strategic plan requires that each teacher _____."
"When administration comes in to observe
they will expect to see _____."
"This year we are adopting _____."
"Our growth targets are _____."

There are multiple bosses to please, each with their own measurable standards. The 4 C's, critical thinking, communication, creativity and collaboration, must be addressed in every lesson. Global connections must be clearly articulated. Literacy and math standards must be evident in all classes. 21st-century skills must be included in daily lessons. Technology must be implemented. Professional Learning Teams must clearly map out steps towards yearly growth. Students must be measured quarterly by these standards. Grades must be updated every two weeks.

How do I find, in all of these clearly articulated expectations, the voice of my own authority? How do I connect what I believe---that the voice of each person's soul speaks the truest authority, with the multiple authorities piled upon my plate each day?

I know what is true for me---that the voice of authority is a deeply resonant inner song. And I stand as a daily witness to the chasm between the imposed authorities and the authority that I speak in my own true voice. I sit quietly with this truth: my voice is

small because there is no longer space for her wisdom. She is silent because she is not invited to speak. The Lumbee within me nods. She knows this truth. For so long, I have lied about the strength of her voice within me. My journal entry from more than ten years ago tells me I have known this truth for a very long time:

9/5/05
I am afraid I will not be seen.
I am afraid I will not be valued.
I am afraid my needs—my essence, my values—won't be known.
There is so much strength and wisdom within me that no one here honors.

DANCE WHEN YOU ARE PERFECTLY FREE

And so, here I am. Small. Quiet. Yet my heart, in these last months of teaching, is so large.

In my best hours, I can approach this dilemma with curiosity. What are the gifts of this season? How can I stand in this space, with full intention and full heart? As I listen for the quietness of my small inner voice, there is a sadness that reverberates. I am standing in what we call in Courage Circles the Tragic Gap. This is a place I know well.....the space between the way things are and the way I dream them to be. I am noticing that, standing in such a wide, spacious cavern, the voice of my truth bounces off the walls. I can feel the power of the reverberation. As I root down into my truth, my voice, the echo of what I know to be true, calls back to me again and again. When standing in the ground of my truth, my voice is surer and stronger. It is my Native Voice, Lumbee Diane.

My students arrive and all of the fake truths fall away. Standing before them, just me with them, I know why I am still here. It's only a mystery when I take my eyes off the children. I have often struggled to love this calling. Teaching adolescents was never my first love.

So much was so hidden and so wrong in my privileged, white adolescence. I have resisted walking this ground again.

But standing in front of my students, I am aware that my experience with holding deep secrets about my identity has nourished my inclination towards silenced voices. My experience of hiding who I am has attuned me to a seeing and being in the world that is exactly what my students crave. My students' voices are silenced. Many authorities negate what they know to be true in their souls. There are few spaces in the vast tragic gap of public schools where adolescents can stand in their own beauty and wrestle with their own truths.

My job is to extend an invitation to dance. I, too, have stood by the sidelines, trying so hard to be invisible. I, too, have stood with my feet frozen, glued to the floor, unable to move. So, here I stand. Around me there is exuberant energy, loud, explosive voices. I know they are hiding, uncertain of what will happen if they claim their own power, speak their own truth. These struggles are timeless. I have known them in my bones, as powerfully so many years ago as they are now. These questions are a deep, resonant rhythm that shakes the ground. We step to the rhythm, together. In the circle of my classroom, we learn to dance in new ways that honor their questions and mine, our hidden brokenness and our emerging wholeness.

And so, as August bends into September and January and May, this is the invitation: To listen to the deep rhythm, to move together in a dance that will never happen this way again and is, paradoxically, always the same. Like my Lumbee ancestors, I claim that false voices do not speak to my truth or to my work. My work is to create spaces where students' voices are honored and their shy souls are held gently. Standing before them, my work is simply to extend an invitation to dance to the rhythm of all of our questions and our fears again and again and again.

AN INVITATION TO DANCE

From my journal 1/17/04: Autopoiesis. We are always self-organizing, continually making and re-making ourselves. How do I honor autopoiesis in my work? In my life? The acorn knows about becoming an oak.

The end of my teaching career will arrive in just a few months. I will be ready to begin a new dance.

I claim my voice. My voice matters. And my dreams matter. I have long dreamed of creating the space where teachers in my state can encounter their truths and speak from their own authority about who they are. Nurturing the *who* above the *how* and the *what* and *when* of our profession feels imperative right now. Providing and sustaining a space where teachers can be invited to dance with their inner wisdom: this is the legacy that matters most to me. I have heard the drumbeat of this call for many years; it has taken great patience to wait for the ending of my work in public schools before launching into this grand dream.

The time is almost here.

My work now is to create spaces where teachers' voices are honored and their shy souls are held gently.

I will still teach voice, but in a very different way. I will teach teachers, as I have taught myself, to hear their voices, to value their voices. Standing with them, my work will be to simply extend an invitation to dance to the rhythm of our questions and our fears and our dreams again and again and again.

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A STEPPING STONE

What is the Clearness Committee, the Clearness Triad?

By Sally Z. Hare

As we gathered the stories for our book, the editors noticed the topic of the Clearness Committee and the Clearness Triad as threads in several of the stories. So we decided to add this stepping stone to lift up the Clearness Committee, a practice that has been used in the Quaker community for over three hundred years, and the special adaption we often used in our Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, the Clearness Triads.

My introduction to this practice more than 25 years ago changed my life. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that with the help of the Clearness Committee, I changed my life. The basic idea behind the process is that each person has an inner teacher, and with the help of our communal resources, we can more clearly hear that inner teacher. That certainly happened for me as I struggled with a career decision.

As Parker J. Palmer so insightfully writes in *The Clearness Committee: A Communal Approach to Discernment*, "On the one hand, we know that the issue is ours alone to resolve and that we have the inner resources to resolve it, but access to our own resources is often blocked by layers of inner 'stuff' – confusion, habitual thinking, fear, despair." The Clearness Committee process allows us to tap into our inner wisdom by using the community to run interference, to help us through our own inner maze.

Parker adapted the traditional Quaker clearness process for our use in Circles of Trust, and it quickly transformed the nature of our being together. We adapted the format of Clearness Triads as a way of extending the clearness process over three days – and going even deeper.

I admit to being awed by the power of the process of the Clearness Committee. It is a simple process – and a sacred one. Parker cautions that the Clearness Committee is not for everyone – or for every setting. The process invites a level of vulnerability that requires a space of safety and trust. It is not a process to be entered into lightly.

Entered into with care and intentionality, the process offers a valuable means of finding clearness in a world that often feels muddy and chaotic. The rules of the Clearness Committee are critical to its success. They create and hold the boundaries for the safe space. Even when group members are familiar with the process, I teach

the rules at the beginning of each session. I want to remind myself as much as anyone of their importance, because the behavior required in Clearness Committees is counterintuitive. The Clearness Committee demands that we suspend our normal ways of doing business, our typical ways of being in our society, in order to be in community in a way that is virtually unknown to us.

Perhaps the most crucial rule is that of confidentiality. We go beyond the familiar confidentiality to what we call deep confidentiality, meaning that committee members would not only never speak to each other or anyone else about the issue when the Clearness Committee ended, but they also would not speak with the focus person about the problem unless she or he requested the conversation.

In most retreat settings, the facilitators invite persons who seek clearness on some issue to volunteer to serve as focus persons. Committees of five or six people are carefully put together by the facilitators, with important input from the focus persons. In the Fellowship Program, we self-selected groups of three – and everyone had the opportunity during the three days to serve as both focus person and committee member.

Time is critical to the process; it can't be rushed. During that scheduled time, committee members practice the discipline of giving the focus person their total attention. They are fully present to the person and his or her issue, listening deeply, creating a space of deep respect. The function of the committee is not to "fix" or give advice, but to help the focus person hear her own inner wisdom, claim his own authority (to literally be the author of her own story).

The committee begins with the focus person sharing his or her issue. *That is when the other critical rule comes into play: Committee members are forbidden to speak to the focus person except by asking open, honest questions.* Since authentic questions are not the norm in our society, the practice of asking open, honest questions requires discipline and self-monitoring. We so easily slip into advice disguised as a question, judgment disguised as a question, sharing our own experiences disguised as questions. "Have you thought about seeing a therapist?" is NOT an open, honest question. Neither is "Have you ever tried to lose some weight?"

What is an open, honest question? Perhaps the best answer to that is that it's a question to which the questioner could have no idea of the answer. The pacing of the questions is as important as the wording of the questions. The Clearness Committee is not a grilling of a suspect or a dissertation defense or a cross-examination; questions should be asked at a gentle, humane pace. Time to reflect on the answers, moments of silence, "wait time" are vital to inviting in the focus person's inner teacher.

The focus person usually responds to the questions. The questions – and the answers – then often lead to deeper questions. The focus person should be brief but full in her

answers, resisting the temptation to tell his entire life's story. Sometimes, for whatever reason, the focus person may choose not to answer a question or may ask to have a question reframed. *The focus person always has the right NOT to answer a question.*

The exception to the rule of asking only open, honest questions may come about ten minutes before the end of the Clearness Committee. At this time, a committee member asks the focus person if he or she would like to have the "question only" rule suspended and to invite committee members to mirror back what they have heard from the focus person. Mirroring is exactly that: the committee member serves as a mirror, holding up for reflection the focus person's own words or body language. Mirroring is not an opportunity to give advice or pronounce judgement.

For the last five minutes, the Clearness Committee members share affirmations and celebrations. As with the other aspects of the process, this is important, as the focus person has been very open and vulnerable with the group. Group members find much to celebrate after a glimpse into the gifts and grace of a human soul.

I said earlier that the behavior required in Clearness Committees is counterintuitive. This means suspending our normal ways of being together – no small talk, no jokes to break the tension, no noisy laughter, no attempt to fix or reassure or comfort the focus person, no patting or touching. The only task for members of the Clearness Committee is to listen deeply and ask thoughtful questions. They are not trying to impress the others by their grasp of the situation or by their ability to ask clever questions. They are charged with holding the space for the focus person, not filling that space with their own egos. The reward for the committee members is often being surprised by some clearness on their own issues, by some insight they weren't expecting.

The Clearness Committee is not about fixing anyone or solving anything. In fact, with a good clearness process, the answers, the insights, continue to come for hours, days, even weeks after the actual meeting. In my own case, I find that I sometimes go back to questions from that first Clearness Committee more than 25 years ago; sometimes I review the notes and have yet another "ah-ha."

Parker first introduced me to the Clearness Committee during that weeklong retreat on leadership and spirituality more than two decades ago. I will never forget Parker's charge to the committee members: he used the metaphor of holding the focus person (me) as if she were a small bird. Your responsibility, he told the group, is to hold the bird safely in your cupped hands rather than giving in to our all-too-human tendencies to either suffocate the bird by closing our hands too tightly or by putting the bird down prematurely or pushing her to fly before she is ready. The success of the clearness process, he told us, is not measured by whether the bird flies, but in how we hold the bird.

Claiming the Birthright Gift of Community: The Work of a Lifetime

By Sally Z. Hare

Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye,
clear. What we need is here.

--from ***Wendell Berry's*** **Wild Geese**

We come into the world knowing that what we need is here. We are born into community, interconnected to everything in the Universe. Quantum physics now confirms the undivided wholeness that every child is born into, the innate sense that we **are** community. And then we become disconnected, and we forget. Finding it again is the work of a lifetime.

Remembering who we are, our sense of community, is the purpose of education. From the Latin word *educare*, to lead forth that which is within, education creates the space for recovering our birthright gift. So the work of **my** lifetime has been not only finding my own sense of community, but learning how to create a space in which my students could find theirs. Now as I reflect back on my life's work as a teacher, including the last two decades as a facilitator of Courage Work and Circles of Trust®, I am grateful to come full circle; to discover, or perhaps recover, that what I need is here.

I know firsthand that there is no quick fix for remembering what Thomas Merton called a hidden wholeness, to living from a place of integrity, to being the person we each came to be. Early in life, we begin to forget that community is our birthright gift, that we are an integral part of Earth and connected with all other living creatures. And yet the national Commission on Children at Risk, an independent, jointly sponsored initiative of the YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values, says we are "hardwired to connect." The group of 33 children's doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals, headed by principal investigator Dr. Kathleen Kovner Kline of Dartmouth Medical School, has concluded that the mechanisms by which children become attached to others are biologically primed and can be discerned in the structure of the brain (see *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,* http://www.americanvalues.org/search/item.php?id=17).

So community begins in the human brain. And the current research in early childhood shows that the human brain begins in community. More than half of brain development occurs in the first two years of life, requiring nurturing, loving connections with adults. There is a four-year critical period from conception until about the third birthday during which the child is learning language and the other physical, social, and emotional skills to be a competent community member.

Too often, in those important first years of life, we don't get what we need to nurture that inborn sense of connectedness. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson famously theorized that the sense of basic trust must take root in the first year of life – and is multi-faceted and depends heavily on our caregivers and our environment. If trust doesn't develop in healthy ways, our sense of connectedness, our very ability to be in community, becomes deformed.

We speak of community as if it exists outside of the individual – but in fact, it is an integral part of the self. We have no adequate English words for describing the wholeness: the integrated form that is the self and the community, the inner and the outer. Community is.

We exist in community. Community exists in us. We can't exist without community, as

Rene Spitz's study of institutionalized orphans dramatically illustrated in the 1940's. These babies and young children literally turned their faces to the wall and died, although they had no discernible problems. The foundling home provided the babies with adequate food, clothing, and medical care, but there was only one nurse for every eight infants, and except for brief feedings and diaper changes, each baby was isolated in his or her crib, its sides draped with sheets to prevent the spread of infection. With a bare minimum of human contact and affection – and no contact with nature, these babies suffered devastatingly, with most dying before the age of two years. Those who lived were physically stunted, highly prone to infection, and severely cognitively and emotionally disabled. By three years of age, many of these children were unable to walk or talk and were described as withdrawn and apathetic.

I realized as a young teacher that community would be essential to creating the space for learning in my classroom, a necessity for my students to thrive. We need relationships with others; we need love; we need touch; we need community. We are communal creatures. We **are** community. Yet we see community as something outside of us, something separate. How could I create that sense of interconnectedness, a feeling of belonging, for my students? How could I create that for myself? Now, at the end of my career of teaching, I am coming to understand that what I need is here.

WRAPPING MY HANDS (AND MIND) AROUND COMMUNITY

Creation myths offer human attempts in every culture, in every time, to explain community, to reduce it to its least common denominator, to make it something around which we can wrap our hands.

Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, in *What Is Life*? (1995), remark on the observation of researchers Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newburg that human beings appear to have "*no choice but to construct myths to explain their world.*" I love the Balinese myth of creation that was shared with me when I spent time exploring that culture: God fashioned figures of clay, but left them in the oven too long, and they were an over-baked black. With the next batch, perhaps overly cautious, God didn't leave the figures in long enough, and they were an underdone white. The last batch of people was just right, a golden brown, and they were the Balinese.

In another sense, the sciences (particularly biology, physics, psychology, sociology) are other human attempts to find meaning, to reduce the idea of community to a definition, an explanation. One fascinating example is *autopoiesis*, the term coined by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, from the Greek roots meaning self (*auto*) and making (*poiein*, as in "poetry"), which refers to life's continuous production of itself. Lynn Margulis (1995) postulates that all of Earth is community, a living system, of which we humans are a part. Her theory of symbiogenesis emphasizes the importance of cooperation over the Darwinian explanation of competition, of community

as the essence of all life. "We are coming to realize that we are part of a global holarchy that transcends our individual skins and even humanity as a whole." I love that word *holarchy*, created by Arthur Koestler to mean the coexistence of small beings in larger wholes, especially because Koestler's coinage is free of implications of "hierarchical" or "higher" or that one of the constituents in the holarchy is somehow controlling the others.

The mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme sees community as the solution to the crisis of mass extinction he feels we are facing today. He says we need to *"reinvent ourselves, at the species level, in a way that enables us to live with mutually enhancing relationships... Not just with humans but with all beings—so that our activities actually enhance the world. At the present time, our interactions degrade everything... What's necessary is for us to understand that, really, at the root of things is community. At the deepest level, that's the center of things. We come out of community. So how then can we organize our economics so that it's based on community, not accumulation? And how can we organize our religion to teach us about community? And when I say 'community,' I mean the whole earth community. That's the ultimate sacred domain—the earth community"* (http://www.wie.org/j19/swimme.asp).

As I wrap my hands and my mind around community, I have moved from seeing community as something to be created ***out there***, external to the individual, a perception of a whole of which the individual is a part, through seeing community ***within*** the individual, not only confined to the body but also our inner experience of the world, to now seeing community as ***both inner and outer***, as not only an entity of which the individual is part, but a holarchy.

community comes to those who empty

a day at brookgreen
of friendship, of writing, of seeing.
a day of community, of clarity,
of paradox, of fullness and fallness.
a day of tears, shared frustrations,
inviting in the dark
as well as the light.
it's so clear community
is not a goal to be achieved –
it takes time and space
and emptying.
it takes slowing down, being
intentional, being gentle.
i can't make community –
but I can revel in it.

--- Sally Z. Hare

NAMING COMMUNITY IN A CIRCLE OF TRUST

My experience in the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship has affirmed for me that trustworthy community is a space where my soul can show up, where I can connect with the seed of true self and can hear my own voice and recover my sense of interconnectedness. Deforming experiences with religious patriarchies cause me to resist that language of soul or true self, and I struggle to find a way to name this voice within that is not owned by any particular creed. It has helped to discover that these concepts exist across every culture and have many names and forms. Thomas Merton calls it true self; the Buddhists, original nature; Quakers, the inner light; Hasidic Jews, the spark of the divine; Humanists, identity and integrity; various Native American traditions use the language of the Great Spirit or Grandfather or Sacred Spirit or the Great Headman.

The language of "hidden selves" in a Writing Circle of Trust with Dr. Sara Sanders and Dr. Janet Files helped me move beyond my stuckness around religious hierarchy. Grounded in their book, *Writing Along the Mobius Strip: A Practice to Set the Heart at Rest,* Sara and Janet created a playful space that freed me to connect with my gifts and their inevitable shadows—and to name for myself those inner guides. These past two years in the Kirkridge Courage Fellows Circle of Trust have offered me the space to encourage those guides to show up.

Parker Palmer defines the way a circle of trust invites this hidden wholeness to come forth: "*Here is one way to understand the relationships in a circle of trust: they combine unconditional love, or regard, with hopeful expectancy, creating a space that both safeguards and encourages the inner journey. In such a space, we are freed to hear our own truth, touch what brings us joy, become self-critical about our faults, and take risky steps toward change."*

Thomas Merton calls it wisdom, the feminine face of all that is sacred, in *Hagia Sophia*: "There is in all things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity, and Integrity, is Wisdom, the Mother of all, *Natura naturans."*

What I name it does not matter as much as **that** I name it, that I recognize that circle of trust, that *"mysterious Unity and Integrity,"* to be community.

THE LAST OF LIFE FOR WHICH THE FIRST WAS MADE

As I approach my seventh decade, I am grateful to be able to say I love my life. I know the ground on which I stand, and I am able to live, most of the time, from a place of abundance and joy and contentedness and the sense that what I need is here, even when clouds of negativity swirl around me. I remember reading, as a young college student, lines from Robert Browning:

Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made

Now I am remembering those lines I loved at age eighteen and realizing that it has taken another 50 years to live into them! I am embracing aging as a privilege. I am understanding the first of life as the work before the Work, and I am embracing the last of life as a time for that Work of integrating the outward and the inward journey to wholeness. I am seeing the relationship of teaching and learning and community with a new clarity, deepened by my work as a Courage facilitator.

Now I am living into a knowing that what I need is here, that I **am** community. Community is not an end to be achieved or a project to be created; it only requires opening our hearts to recognize and receive our birthright gift. As I claim this privilege of aging and becoming an elder, I am finding this time of life to be one of recovery as well as discovery of knowing community as both inner and outer, of my sense that we **are** community, that what we need is here.

Another gift of this age is recovering the joy of learning, of reading whatever I choose; no grades, no requirements. I read Chief Seattle: "*This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*"

I discover Margaret Wheatley's valuable perspective for looking at community through the lens of quantum physics, chaos theory, and the science of living systems in *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe* (1994): "*How do you understand a world in which the only material form is that of relationships, and where there is no sense of an individual that exists independent of its relationships? That was the gift of the quantum worldview. It said there are no independent entities anywhere at the quantum level. It's all relationships. That was something that made a lot of sense to how we were starting to think about organizations — as webs of relationships. But the real eye-opener for me was to realize how control and order were two different things, and that you could have order without control. That was a major shift in my own thinking that I certainly discovered through the science.*"

Order without control gives me a new and vibrant frame for life at this stage, far more accurate than *retirement*. In fact, I find the word *retirement* to be of no use -- and even, at times, to be a damning and limited naming for this creative stage of life. I love hearing Gloria Steinem say that "*People often ask me at this age who am I passing the torch to? First of all, I'm not giving up my torch, thank you! I'm using my torch to light other people's torches. … If we each have a torch, there's a lot more light.*"

I don't want to give up my torch. I want to be of use, to go even deeper into this work of my lifetime, into claiming this birthright gift of community. I am drawn to the labyrinth as a metaphor for seeing my life now. The labyrinth, unlike the maze, has no dead ends and is not a place where one can get lost, although the path may meander and seem confusing. There is only one way in and one way out – and all paths lead to the center and then back to the beginning. With a labyrinth there is only one choice to be made -- the choice to enter or not. A receptive mindset is needed; a labyrinth is not a goal to be achieved. At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the center of one's deepest self and back out into community.

Some days internet and newspaper headlines and TV news seem to defy my knowing of community as our national consciousness is bombarded with a growing sense of disconnectedness and isolation. From the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the Columbine shootings in 1999, the 21st century was ushered into the United States with violence that has continued with the Mother Emmanuel Church massacre and the Boston Marathon bombings and the Orlando murders and too many others. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* was one of the first books in a long line of 21st century bestsellers to attempt to find ways to understand social change in the United States. Putnam's detailed graphs and tables point to his belief that we are looking for ways to create or re-create social capital as the antidote for the so-called loss of community.

I say "so-called" because I don't believe we lose community any more than I believe we can create it. Humans can't exist without community. If we've lost anything, it's our own hearts – and our own capacity to **know** that what we need is here, around us and within us. And our system of education is failing miserably in creating the space for recovering our birthright gift.

No, we haven't lost community, and yet we cite the breakdown of community as the cause for everything from children murdering each other in schools to racism and ethnocentrism to drug overdoses to the high rates of suicide. The disappearance of community gets the blame for why we are destroying the planet – and it is Brian Swimme's answer to what he calls the crisis of mass extinction.

ARRIVING WHERE I STARTED

We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.

--T. S. Eliot (from *Little Gidding*)

This place of knowing community feels familiar. Yet, to use the poet Eliot's words, I am knowing the place for the first time. Much of my career in higher education has been about community and the critical relationship of community and learning. I understand, as I wind down a lifetime of teaching, that the purpose of education is to rid ourselves of the illusion of separation between the individual and the community, the internal and the external.

Teacher: A Definition

Facilitating, teaching, guiding, learning,
Weaving connections,
Listening to unspoken as well as spoken;
Using silence to hear herself, to hear her students into their voices.
What is the teacher anyway but guide on the inner journey,
A kind of human compass, always pointing toward north?

She's a weaver
Of connections inside, outside, over, across,
down, under, through, between—
Of connections that hold space for the learner
To construct her own knowing.

She's a mirror
Of the student's reflection,
Of the light to better hold the student
So he can see his own gifts, name himself,
Create himself in his own image.

She's a creator
Of space in which the growing can happen,
Of silence in which the learner can hear herself;
Of her own knowledge about how to tend a garden,
Whether to use ladybugs or Sevin dust, to water or wait for the rain,
To plant the seed just beneath the surface or deeper still.

She's a seeker
Of her own Truths
Of her own gifts
Of who she is and whose she is.
She may never know.
But it's her life's work anyway.

--- Sally Z. Hare

Even as I still struggle with the language, these past two years with the Kirkridge Courage Fellows have deepened my experience of the power of a trustworthy community to a level beyond any I had previously experienced. Growth and transformation happen in ways that seem tangible, and I have a strong sense that individual change is vital to community transformation. I embrace that trust is the essential element of knowing community, and my experience affirms research findings that respect is the key to creating trust. In fact, trust and respect seem to be the true north of my compass on this journey of a lifetime.

Parker Palmer, with his gentle but fierce manner of safeguarding the Courage Work, insists that the space in a Circle of Trust is only for the purpose of the individual's inner work and is never the means to any other end, including community. Yet in my years of experience with two-year seasonal groups and even in one-time three-day retreats, I watch community happen; I see community become visible.

I realize that I have always known that community is more important to learning than any technique or method. When I first came into the role of facilitator, I spent a lot of time talking with Parker and the other pilot facilitators about the difference in teaching and facilitating. Now, after twenty years of Circles of Trust and especially the recent Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, I know there is a seamlessness between good teaching and good facilitating, between creating the space for others and creating the space for myself. As I glimpse the hidden wholeness, I celebrate that what I need is here.

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On Becoming a Witness

By Karen Noordhoff

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.

-- Albert Einstein

In the summer of 2015, I found myself in the middle of many nights praying fervently, even feverishly, for the physical safety of my then 95-year-old mother who lived alone in her house of 38 years, supported by some daytime care. Some weeks later in the middle of the night, she fell and broke her collarbone. In my journal I wrote with a sense of knowing from who-knows-where, "This must be the beginning of the end." At this time, I was called to move even more deeply into the practice of "being a witness" to my mother's completion of this earthly life and her passage from it. And, in the aftermath of her death, I was to experience others witnessing me.

In this story I want to share reflections about my ongoing, transformative journey toward being more strongly connected to the wholeness of my soul. When I sense moments of this connection, I feel more fully human. And, just as importantly, the more firm this connection, the more capable I am of offering my best self with authenticity, integrity, courage and faithfulness to others through my roles, responsibilities and relationships.

I'll share with you experiences surrounding my mother's death and of community in that period and how my search for my life's soulful purpose is being deepened and re-formed – all of this in the context of my exploration of being and becoming a "witness." Still, I continue to struggle, in the most positive sense, to find language that describes and names these beautifully mysterious experiences and ruminations.

I use "witness" in my story and reflections to suggest an active yet tender practice in presence, rather than referring to the usual and more specific legal or religious meanings. (I hope that those readers who may feel injured or deformed from their experiences with "witnessing" in the more traditional senses will read on!) As significant and valuable as acts of witnessing in the legal and religious senses can be, for me the idea of "being a witness" is more encompassing and perhaps, more blurred or mysterious. A working definition I've developed is: A tender, non-anxious witness contains the space for truth, as well as for possible healing and wholeness, to emerge – particularly an inner truth to be expressed in one's life.

From my perspective and experience, witnessing is a participatory way of being. It is more than mere observation, more than acting as a disinterested spectator or voyeur. Rather, I see witnessing as a way of being in relation with others and with oneself that comes from first-hand knowing on the part of the witness. (The root of the word *witness* derives from the Old English "wit," referring to one's own knowledge or knowing and is also related to "wisdom.") It involves deliberately giving over oneself to profound awareness and attention.

True witnessing honors and provides companionship to others on their journey toward greater connection to their innate wholeness. Respectful deep listening to words and actions as well as what is left unsaid or not enacted – without interruption and/or agenda – plays an important and necessary part in witnessing, as does silence (interesting to note that the words **listen** and **silent** are both composed of the same letters). Both listening and silence can sometimes be taken as an absence of talk. Instead, to me, witnessing through listening and silence shows itself as a kind of live existence and an encounter of present energies.

Sometimes being a witness happens in the setting of one-on-one conversations and at other times in group facilitation, as well as in the context of social justice and peace work. For instance, during a recent conversation with a long-time friend, I came to "know" that what she truly wanted from me was not just my listening keenly to the stories of her daily activities, but my witnessing the condition of her life. Similarly, in a Circle of Trust I facilitated, I listened as a participant spoke of the disconnection between his values and the kinds of decisions he was pushed to make by his work

organization. In his struggles, I was called to witness his broken heart. In these instances, I felt wakeful, alert, and attentive. I felt both centered and on the edge. I felt fully there and not there. Given my personal explorations and experiences, I focus here on witnessing in the context of more intimate relationships, rather than in regard to larger socio-political systems and cultural dynamics. No matter the type of interaction or context, witnessing each other embodies holding or steadfastly standing with each other with compassion and the courage to hear the truth.

David Hagstrom, in his poem, describes for me what I experienced every weekend during intensive hour-long phone conversations with my mother:

Witness

Standing watch
With her, with him
Keeping the vigil
Listening carefully

Remaining steadfast
Deliberately waiting
Cherishing the quiet
Embracing silence

Resting together
One being heard
The other, a witness
To truth, to what's real

-- David Hagstrom

Over the years, these opportunities to practice witnessing with Mom were usually on Saturdays, always 9 a.m. my time, noon hers, given that we lived on opposite coasts of the continent. We could count on each other's presence, and I particularly wanted to offer her deep listening, a wholehearted connection, and a space for truth. Not surprisingly, all such gifts returned to me manyfold.

Particularly during the last year of her life, my mother questioned "why am I still here?" She declared that no one knew what it was like to be her at her age. I agreed and added, "But we can be with each other." Speaking about the power of friendship and connection, Mom passionately remarked, "When everything is taken away, what you

want is to have a friend." At the same time, Mom's realistic hope and her deep faith brought her each morning to ask, "What are God's priorities for me right now?" just as she also stated, "We only have the present." As well, she often spoke of others' suffering; she described the world as both "devastating and delightful." Looking ahead, my mother even said that she thought she'd "still be learning, even up in Heaven." We often spoke about the nature of paradox – living with two apparent opposites held in a both/and relationship – such as the gifts of dependence *and* freedom, questioning or struggling *and* acceptance or submission, attending to the present *and* anticipating dying and heaven. I found her to be creatively trying to live in the inevitable tragic gap between "what is," or reality, and "what can be," or possibility, as she reflected on her end-of-life preparations and choices. I was reminded of what I now understand to be the practice of Wei-wu-wei, "the action of nonaction," the central paradox of Taoism. My challenge as a daughter and witness in this place of nonaction was to be, as much as possible, a non-anxious presence.

HOLDING THE LABYRINTH

Before carrying on with my story, I need to look backward a bit to explain and explore how I came to use the language and practice of "witnessing" in my life and work. It is a part of my own journey toward greater connection to my soul's wholeness, toward living my life in the most authentic, integrated, courageous, and faithful ways possible. My focused, intentional exploration of "being/becoming a witness" began in earnest in May, 2014, but this search may well be the continuation of a longer thread in my life, one that has been further stretched and strengthened by the death of my mother.

I've always felt myself to be a kind of reflective observer; other folks also have noted over the years that this quality is essential to how they know me. It seems to be a birthright gift of mine. Yet, being a witness seems to call into play something beyond sensitive watchfulness. That's what I had the unexpected opportunity to explore when I was asked to "hold" the labyrinth as part of the 2014 Global Gathering of Courage & Renewal Facilitators.

As I interpreted this invitation, doing so meant introducing its journey-based metaphorical and meditative practice to those persons new to it, providing a small handout of background and resources, leading folks in silence to the labyrinth and remaining outside it to support their experience of a bounded and safe space for their embodied inner work. In addition, as I stood at the threshold of the labyrinth and people walked its curving paths, I found myself observing and praying for the so-called pilgrims ("may her journey be safe," "may this journey bring him guidance"), carefully

watching the birds and clouds and feeling the changing winds, and blessing each person as they emerged from the walk – all things I had not planned.

As the participants exited the labyrinth or sought me out during the rest of the day, they shared their experience of being "held" and what it had meant to them. For instance, they used language such as "invisible but palpable, steady presence," "loving, grounded encourager," and "a shepherd tending." One labyrinth-walker wrote me after the Gathering to say: "Thank you for your faithful and generous holding of the space as people walked the labyrinth at the Gathering. I have never had the experience of turning and turning and seeing someone standing at the entrance and tending the pilgrims. It was **lovely**, and for me, added an important element of being 'witnessed' and honored in my walk." Both at the Gathering and later, I felt greatly touched and moved. When thanked, I found myself spontaneously replying, "It was my true **joy** to hold you in that way." Indeed, in holding the labyrinth, I was granted an embodied experience of the poet William Stafford's words in *You Reading This, Be Ready*: *"How you stand here is important. How you / listen for the next things to happen. How you breathe."*

I write about these responses not to convey my "goodness," but rather to share my own experience, which was the door opening widely onto the concept and practice of witnessing. I've come to realize the several layers of witnessing that seemed to be present in this mutual experience of the labyrinth. First, I was being a witness to others on their journeys. I was providing a kind of non-intrusive, non-anxious companionship, even as I did not move from the threshold of the labyrinth. Second, it seemed that a part of me witnessed myself as I held those travelers on the walk to the center and out again. It might be said that my inner Self witnessed the self who was attending to the walkers. (Exploring the idea and activity of an "inner witness" is calling me these days.) And then, finally, I received witnessing by those pilgrims putting one foot in front of the other along that circular path. They said they experienced and witnessed my inner gifts in the context of that moment-in-time's expression of my Work in the world, my role as "holder" of the labyrinth.

Even at the time, I wrote in my journal that my own experience of this particular holding of the labyrinth felt like another and deeper level of recognition and sense of a birthright gift, a kind of deep core quality of who I am. Even then, I named my felt-presence as "witnessing/being a witness." I was (and am) in new territory, even though I've felt a vague but persistent attraction to the idea of "witnessing" in the sense I suggested above since sometime in my late 30s or early 40s. This labyrinth experience and now my experience of my mother's death, as well as the attendant experiences of community, have come together to evoke this statement around my

gifts, Work in the world, and quite possibly, my life's purpose.

After the time of holding the labyrinth at the 2014 Gathering, I began to read and write about what being and becoming a witness might mean, such as ideas about what a witness does (or not) and the qualities called for in a witness. Although I sought out and made lists of resources to research and people to talk to, my usual strategy into a project, what I found myself doing instead was following my nose, making the path by walking, simply following where my energy and interest wanted to go. This adventure was exhilarating and non-stressful!

At about the same time, I also began to participate in the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program, an ongoing group of 27 Courage & Renewal facilitators attending a series of retreats to foster our personal wholeness, and in the process, deepen our facilitation of Circles of Trust and our use of the Courage principles and practices in other settings (e.g., consulting, coaching, health care and non-profit organizations, educational institutions). In this community, focused conversations and activities helped me approach the concept and practice of witnessing "at a slant" through poetry, fairytales and the visual arts. Hearing others' stories of life and work encouraged me toward more deeply understanding witnessing in terms of social action.

But my understanding and practice of being a witness remained limited. Until I received more personal and heightened experience, I wasn't fully prepared or able to move in the direction I was feeling called.

BEING WITNESSED

Then, my concerns about my mother, as I shared at the beginning, began seriously in the summer of 2015. Her fall and collarbone break in late August called for 24/7 in-home attention, a real strain on her finances and nerves, as well as for my brother and me, even though we all felt immensely grateful for the exceptional care she received. I began to experience an overriding and ominous sense of heaviness and increasing dread. My husband and I canceled our three-month autumn sabbatical in France.

My phone-witnessing intensified. As in previous year's in-person visits and over recent phone calls, I noticed the need for what I came to call "focused flexibility." I needed to be completely focused and fully flexible, in other words completely attentive (often to the particular), while being as absolutely open and receptive as possible, able to shift without effort.

In late September my brother and I visited Mom at her home. As a small family of three, we all spoke candidly and Mom gave us children the blessed gift of volunteering to move to an assisted-living setting. I further explored such options and imagined that she and we could make a move in November so that she wouldn't have to pass

another worrisome winter in the house, as much as she loved that private, quiet, comforting space looking out onto the woods, now beginning to turn yellow-orange-red. I left on September 30th, heading toward one of the Fellowship retreats, tearfully choking my good-bye with the words, "I'll be back."

And I did come back on October 18th.

Having spent a couple of weeks trying to hone in on an assisted-living situation that was available, affordable, and would fit Mom's needs, I then attended the 2015 Gathering of Courage & Renewal Facilitators in Minneapolis in mid-October. I was agitated, anxious, deeply discontented, even disoriented. In response to a journal-writing prompt in one session, I wrote, *"Am I brave enough to **invite** what is coming?"* I felt the ocean swells coming my way.

As the Gathering concluded two days after my journal writing, I picked up a text message from the nurse with my mother's home-care service that Mom had been taken to the emergency room that morning. Within minutes, I learned from the ER doctor that my mother was dying and in accordance with her wishes, I communicated that she wanted no extreme measures but only comfort. In fact, I was told she would not have survived any extreme measures. She was given two or three days to linger in transition. I was catapulted out of the practicalities of being a care partner and into deep mystery.

My friend and co-facilitator, Celine, accompanied me from the conference site to the airport and stayed by my side until my ticket was changed, and I moved through the security line. I felt her guardian spirit even as I knew that I was on my own. Still, I knew she would have sat vigil with me, right there in the pre-formed, plastic seats as long as I needed her with me. I traveled from Minneapolis toward western North Carolina, where my mother had lived and was to die. I had to make a change of planes in Chicago. This poem tells the story of this part of my journey:

For Elizabeth – in 12B

You, in your twenties,
Gray sweater
Blondish hair
Playing solitaire
And reading your book
For the hour it took
To fly into O'Hare.

I, huddled, up against
The fuselage

Short on time
Encased in unknown paradigm
And short on breath, it being shallow
Tears constant yet still gentle
Headed toward a bedside vigil.

My phone, on landing in the night
Trills, carries voice and heart-rending news
From the calm, plain-spoken hospice nurse
At the Four Seasons Elizabeth House:
"I'm sorry to bring you this word,
Your mother will probably die" I heard
"In these next few moments."

And into the deepest silence
Of the dark vast Universe
I fell
With audible gasp inhaled
As my mother exhaled her own at last
Tell her "Karen loves you" I asked.
"I will, but she may have already gone."

Hunched over my lap
Hugging belly like hers from which I'd come
Head on the seat before me, eyes a-blur
Keening such sobs I did not know whose they were
I feel the young woman lean toward my shoulder
"Do you want a hug?" she offers to enfold me.
But I couldn't accept at that time.

Crying still, but softer now
Abruptly and so utterly alone,
Now on my back I sense a gentle hand
And with me a kind spirit in this sudden anguished land
Later raise my head, turn toward her side
With quivering mouth say, "My mother has just died."
I receive her hug and tissues, try to dry my eyes.

Then I ask, "What is your name, please?"
With soft, peaceful and calm whisper
"It's Elizabeth," she replies

I sense it's my open soul she sees.

Nonetheless, I am so alone
Yet not completely as I breathe
Grateful for her presence to my sorrow, attentiveness
To my suffering – a quiet, loving, tender witness.
I must walk now into the airport's frenzied pace
The bright, glaring fluorescence of this place,
Enlightened in this passage of my own:

Who else is in pain, here in this space?
For whom am I now called to bear
Witness to their woundedness
With generous, compassionate grace?

Elizabeth, Elizabeth:
Accompanying angel and a place of death
Both witness to surrender, to release
Into the arms of deepest sorrow and of peace
Carry us in transition below and above
So that into the depths of the Great Love
We rest.

-- Karen Noordhoff

In those profound moments, Elizabeth – sitting next to me in seat 12B – held me; in a sense she rested with me in my distress. So I call her my witness.

As my companion, she witnessed my truth, my reality. Although as I've written, I felt "utterly alone," I also felt her deliberate, compassionate and wholehearted presence, fully within my sphere, just as I'd felt Celine's earlier. I was not in this space entirely alone. With her witnessing of me, Elizabeth created an intimate community, even communion, between us, ultimately without intrusion or interference into my experience.

As it turned out, a kind of community-of-the-moment also gathered around me in our part of the plane. It manifested in the form of multiple packages of tissues! When I left, Elizabeth gave me four packets that had been passed over the seats and aisles, touched by many hands connecting their hearts to mine. As I exited, passengers smiled gently and lovingly at me and wished me well.

I entered the community of the Elizabeth House hospice well after midnight. Margo, the hospice nurse I'd spoken with on the phone on landing in Chicago, along with her

assistant, quietly greeted and welcomed me. In the waiting room, I received soothing chamomile tea in a china cup. Then, I sat with my mother, just the two of us, into the deepest part of the night, although her spirit had already left her body.

During the days and weeks that followed – what even then I called a period of "sorrow and grace" – facilitators from the Courage & Renewal community reached out to me in waves of witnessing. I felt astonished, saturated, and at times overwhelmed in the best sense by the magnitude and generosity of their acts of kindness, words of comfort and courage. Courage facilitator-friends I knew well and others I did not stepped into my circle of grief to gather me up in their arms, literally and at a distance. Anne and Tom drove hours to pick up my husband at the airport and deliver him to my doorstep. Karen opened her heart and home to me during a snowstorm later in the year when I returned to clear out my mother's home. Sally called at just the right moments.

As well, the Kirkridge Fellows confirmed the necessity and power of community as a space for witnessing. During each of the retreats I subsequently attended, I checked in with the full circle, sharing the story of dispersing my parents' possessions, readying their home for sale, donating my mother's original paintings, working intensely with my brother – and all the accompanying feelings and learnings. The Fellows held it all, steadfastly standing **by** and **with** me, yet without trying to fix me or make it all better. Individually and as a collective, they witnessed my emotional and spiritual condition and accompanied me on my journey as a daughter and as a person becoming more wholly connected to her soul.

Finally, how very fortunate I am that my mother continues to be a witness to me, as well. During the Christmas holidays following her death, I came upon the birthday card she'd given me just six weeks before she died:

> *Dear Karen*
>
> *Wishing you a Birthday of beautiful moments,*
> *wonderful memories and nothing but happiness*
> *for all the days ahead.*
> *Your Mom loves you so very much*

Reading it again then was a numinous moment as I literally heard her voice speak to me. Reading her message again, now, I hear her wishes for the rest of my life, of which she will always be a part and a witness, but not in the same way as we'd known each other for 68 years.

The whole set of experiences I've related here – holding the labyrinth, my initial exploration of witnessing, hoping to be a witness honoring my mother, and then in the

aftermath of her death my having been offered others' tender, healing companionship as witnesses to me – and so much more, has called me to live more wholeheartedly, with more authenticity, integrity, courage, and faithfulness. Even in and because of this time of loss, I have become more connected to my soul's wholeness. This wholeness is touched by my mother's spirit.

RECEIVING GIFTS

The further gifts I've received from these experiences are personal, communal, and vocational. These are the gifts I know of; no doubt there are others that have yet to come to my awareness.

First, and personally, I've ridden the waves of emotion in the months since the summer of 2015. When I was in the trough of those waves, I couldn't see the horizon of my life. I floundered although I also knew in my own depths that my boat was a safe one; I felt upheld in these turbulent times by a Source, a Love greater than myself.

And because I've experienced what at times felt like little control over events, others' actions, evolving situations, and sometimes even my own responses, I've also found myself of necessity or inevitability letting intuition, rather than reflection, take the lead. It's not that my inclination toward thought and reflection left me; I knew and used both expressly in this time. As a result, what I've come to call "focused flexibility" became required and called into play.

Just as focused flexibility came forward in witnessing, listening, and responding to my mother and her circumstances, I also recognized its simple-yet-complex, unexplainable company and support as I mourned my mother and responded to the practical needs of selling her house, clearing out her earthly tent of material goods in the resulting storage units, and dispersing her life's creativity. In so doing, I received guidance from both mind *and* spirit, thought *and* intuition.

Yet, and this is a second gift, I was not solely on my own, then – or now, as I continue to approach firmer ground, emotionally and spiritually, and have the possibility of again seeing a horizon in my life. In terms of community, as I rode those waves, others accompanied me in the boat, particularly my husband and brother (both my "Davids"), and especially those in the community of Courage & Renewal facilitators, particularly our Kirkridge Courage Fellows. Being a witness or being witnessed by another is essentially an act of community, perhaps communion. We commune with each other. This story began in community with the holding of the labyrinth, carried on in an airplane, then became visible in the community of facilitators who gathered around me. And, in my "going public" with this story and my reflections, I am reaching out to an unknown community.

Finally, in terms of my vocation – especially as expressed in my work facilitating

Circles of Trust in the context of Courage & Renewal retreats – I continue to explore the intersection of soul and role, both mine and yours. The condition of my soul manifests in my roles and relationships. Who I am intermingles with who you are. Our gifts, shadows, and stories interrelate. Yet, the space of witnessing is more than one of interaction.

It is "thin."

It is a space where the human or earthly/physical and the eternal, some would say divine or the Divine, come together, collaborate and co-create. Perhaps witnessing as a thin place can be described as porous, permeable, and penetrable. Might it be a space where one absorbs another, like a sponge, yet remains appropriately non-attached? Indeed, it is a space of integration and transformation. I do not sense this space of witnessing as a thin place with my five senses; hence, I find myself only able to use language like "mysterious" and "energetic."

As well, I've come to realize through the process of being witnessed myself that I have been initiated, am being initiated, into a deeply meaningful, consequential, even mystical practice. In a sense, I've traveled through a rite of passage with my mother's death. I am coming back from that experience having been transformed into a new way of being, emerging into a deeper stage of life or sense of role. In other words, it has not been enough to intellectually understand the idea and practice of witnessing. To profoundly experience it myself – as a recipient – has given me a clearer window on and more compelling perception of the practice of being a witness.

Thus, my significant, perhaps – at least for me – momentous, experiences holding the labyrinth (being a witness) and those surrounding my mother's death (being witnessed by others) are leading me toward a deepened sense and practice of being a witness for others – both in one-on-one situations and also as a facilitator in a group setting. What is required of me now in this practice? I am called to be receptive, fully openhearted, indeed broken-openhearted.

Witnessing another demands of me that I allow my vulnerability, without imposing it. My own soul must be given space to come forth. Being a soulful witness in these ways also creates space for another's soul to show up. Witnessing creates an ill-defined but palpable space for healing and wholeness to emerge for both the one(s) being witnessed and the witness.

FINISHING, FOR NOW

My experiences of the past few years have shown and taught me what it means to let my life speak, rather than my telling my life what it is or is to be. Whereas I first mentioned "reflective observation" as a central birthright gift of mine, I no longer believe that language adequately describes or names the form of the gift that is now

seeking to emerge in me. This gift is more than being renamed; it is being re-formed. Perhaps I am actually growing into, living more deeply into (if those aren't contradictory metaphors) the gift that has always been there. I would now say that my life's purpose is to become and be a witness. It takes more than a bit of courage for me to make this declaration, to claim this gift and practice!

So, what might such a bold statement mean to my Work in the world – to my roles, relationships and responsibilities – both in my daily life and in my facilitation of Circles of Trust? I don't quite know yet, but I do know that standing in the ground of fertile questions is helpful to my growth. Here are mine, for now:

- Is "witnessing" the place where my soul and role come together most deeply?
- Moreover, if witnessing is to be a way in which I serve others – not something to be accomplished or achieved, but rather a gift to be received – how might I make myself available to witness?

I'm further guided by the desire to welcome, co-create and hold transformative spaces, ones in which witnessing plays an essential part, inspired by Shannon Huffman Polson's words:

> *There is no greater intimacy than sitting with someone traversing the tenuous boundary between worlds, sitting vigil with a spirit trembling on the border, reaching toward the new and releasing the old*
> (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/5304504.Shannon_Huffman_Polson).

Although Polson may well be referring to the space between life and death, her words, for me, might also refer to the way I can be with – can witness – another person involved in any transformative change.

During the week that I completed this story, I received word from a long-time friend that he may die of brain cancer. He is reaching out, sharing the living questions of his inner life. As for me, I am being offered a clear response to the question from a stanza of my poem "For Elizabeth – in 12B" and I am utterly and overwhelmingly moved by his trust in me:

> *Who else is in pain, here in this space?*
> *For whom am I now called to bear*
> *Witness to their woundedness*
> *With generous, compassionate grace?*

I began this essay with Albert Einstein's words: *"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious."* My mother's life and death have brought such incredible

mysterious beauty into my life, as did the holding of the labyrinth and my being held in community. To have others be a witness to me and to witness others will always be an experience of mystical grace.

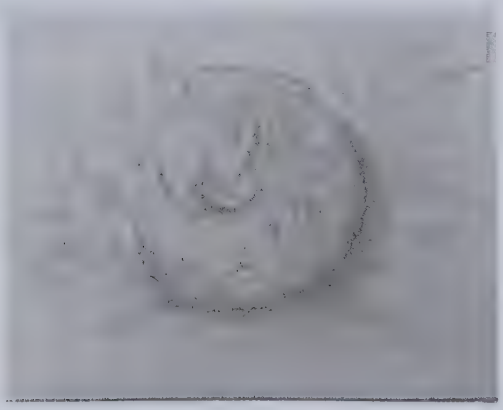
Having journeyed through these times, I'm becoming more powerfully aware and genuinely moved toward my true gift and the practice of being a witness. May I bring all of this mysterious beauty and the wholeness of my soul to my life, to my family, friends, and others I do not know well, and to my work as a facilitator of Circles of Trust. May I do so with authenticity, integrity, courage and faithfulness.

Karen Noordhoff is a facilitator of Courage & Renewal offerings with 18 years experience, having served educators from PreK-12 and university settings, leaders in spiritual communities and non-profits, and cross-professional groups. She is a professor emerita at Portland State University (Portland, OR) with interests in spirituality and education. As well as living in Portland, she and her husband, David, spend time in central Oregon where they walk the labyrinth at their cabin in the high desert called "The Clearing." Karen can be reached via email at karennoordhoff@yahoo.com

A Love Story about Pangolin and All Wild Beings

By Carol Kortsch

Tender warmth permeated our group conversation that morning. We had just returned for our fourth three-night retreat; twenty-four hearts spilled gratitude to once again sit together in our Kirkridge Courage Fellowship meeting room. The expansive Delaware River Valley horizon spread out below and above us, completing some infinite circle that echoed the mystery of our traveling as a community of seekers.



"*I feel like a pangolin,*" I blurted out, surprising even myself. "*I realize that part of me is curled up tightly, hidden inside an armored ball of scales. Today I feel very hesitant and fearful to show up, to come out and expose what is inside.*" Tentatively, I continued with this inner dialogue, speaking to the center of our circle from my heart. "*I sense I am carrying some deep grief that is too much to bear alone.*"

In the open space that followed, as my companions listened, as my tears softened my fears of speaking, I was recalling the memory of my unique childhood pet – a great pangolin. I had named him Chantilly Lace, because he was anything but delicate and see-through. Raised in Central Africa, I had the privilege of being up close and personal with many wonderful creatures, but in my mind, the pangolin was a creature straight out of the mythic past, out of the back-end inferno of God's creation. Chantilly was so utterly weird that he gave me goose-bumps being alone with him, but I also recall he felt particularly "mine" in some dark way. Sixty years later, it was clear that we were still becoming acquainted, still connected, still living in relationship. How curious.

Have you ever struggled with feelings that seemed bigger than words, or remained silent in a group, aware of a desperate need to communicate but sincerely concerned that no one else would understand you? On this morning I recall how overwhelmed I felt after a decade of living on a financial roller coaster. Our family life had always lived outside of many cultural norms that bring material security - that had been a conscious choice we made following in the radical steps of our parents - but this past season had shattered my confidence, and I was clearly lost in the void between feast and famine. Too much and/or too little of anything tends to flood our human psyche; so I arrived "flooded" into our community group.

So you, like me, may be wondering,

Why did this image hold so much energy?
How it is that childhood experience leaves such a mark on psyche and spirit?
How does each of us as individuals, organizations, or nations carry stretch marks, shadows, and gifts from all the past connections of our lives?
How can we access the power trapped in our shadowy inner world?

It has been my practice in my adult life to circle around questions about the real-life effects of our human "outer" and "inner" community. The complex interaction of my private and my public world-views often have left me standing alone, divided inside myself while struggling to keep my head high with the understanding of my mind. I have fought in goal-oriented ways up many mountain paths, leaped across contrasting water-sheds, only to consistently discover skeins of dualistic and/or myopic vision.

What do I see with clarity -- and what is hiding?
Who or what do I cherish, get close to – or am I repulsed by?
Why as a human do I have so many ways to run from the painful struggle towards change and growth?

Questions like these have been food for years of reflection. How good to journey with courageous circles of individuals who are committed to living in the authenticity of the undivided life. My journey keeps descending into the depths, into the shadows, and in this circle at Kirkridge, the word "community" had taken on fresh meaning. What joy to feel more energized by my work and my relationships than ever before. How remarkable that to walk in more wholeness gave me opportunity to keep searching for those parts of me that are waiting in hiding, longing to be found. As I seek daily for more whole ways to live in a broken world, I am deeply grateful for a trusting community within which to practice these new ways of being.

In the shadow-lands my soul searches for images, and as a writer today - for words. Like the pangolin, darker, more hidden aspects of my being are scrabbling around below the surface. Some just need the light of consciousness; others become fodder for my creative life force. As we sat together that morning, I realized how urgently, almost explosively, a darker, less social part of me needed to move into the light of awareness. In discovering that, like the pangolin, my soul is mostly a night animal, this gift of metaphor opened an underworld of meaning. I could name many other creatures in the same breath, but Chantilly and I are so much more alike than first appearances!

This shy being, the pangolin, staggers around clumsily on two back legs and uses extraordinarily sharp claws to dig burrows and tear apart rock piles while searching for ants. When under threat, this scaly creature will curl up into an impenetrable ball. I recall that as curious children we attempted to prove who might be the strongest. Who could pull Chantilly Lace apart without cutting their fingers on his razor-sharp scales? We wondered what was inside. What was he hiding so zealously – maybe we might find his belly button, or catch a glimpse of some juicy genitalia? Poor Chantilly. No wonder he clawed his way out of his cage one night!

I remember being very sad and yet somehow also cherishing his freedom and his need to escape. As a child in boarding school, with my missionary parents hundreds of miles away in another country, unconscious parts of me resonated deeply with this scaly creature. And years later, it was not unlike the resonance I was feeling in this circle of kindred spirits.

Thus it was that I sat in our circle of facilitators, troubled and challenged with another iteration of the age-old question: "*At this season of my life - who am I, and what gifts do I offer into the world*?" I felt like Rilke's wonderful lines: "*I am circling around God, around the ancient tower, and I have been circling for a thousand years, and I still don't know if I am a falcon, or a storm, or a great song.*"

When Chantilly resurfaced in my mind that day, he brought with him a flood of awareness that continues to inspire and challenge me. In that moment I was able to admit publicly that I was feeling ornery, aggrieved, and imprisoned. I recognized my own sharp claws that itched to hurl around stones and throw dirt and make a big mess of this loving, kind circle. A part of me felt very alone and despite the good company, I was hungry for the deepest kind of soul food that this world can offer – that of my innate and often hidden wildness. In a lifetime of good service, I have learned to shield others from this unruly self and have grown a tough, protective, and shining armor; my ego skills are well-honed, finely-tuned, and in good working order. I still wasn't sure that all of me was acceptable or wanted, but I knew that somehow I had to move this volcanic energy beyond the neat circle of chairs and gentle conversation.

Do you know that pangolins dive headfirst into an anthill because they have no chink in their system where ants can attack? A pangolin is invulnerable when they hunt their food supply and unappetizing to their foes. Even the eyes and ears of pangolins have tough nictitating membranes that wipe away and close off access to the invading hordes – other than humans.

Have you noticed that certain stories, people, or sayings haunt you? How they keep popping up, grab a thought, or some deep sense of knowing, and then disappear into an elusive shadow? Parker Palmer has taught us well, saying often, "*The soul is a shy wild animal. It shows up at the corners of our awareness.*" It was like that too with this wild visitor - Chantilly. He had already been agitating to be recognized as part of my own shadow; my soul was burrowing up from the darker and less penetrable places of my being.

Curiously, a few days before our Kirkridge Courage Fellows meeting, I had been shocked to read an article about the giant pangolin by Jeff Flocken, "*The shy, nocturnal creature is the most trafficked mammal in the world. Almost a million pangolins were*

trafficked in the past 10 years. We are finding crates filled with pangolin scales, entire boats with bags of live, or frozen and dead, pangolins that are being taken from the wild." It used to be for the value of their countless scales, but now pangolin meat is considered a luxury item in parts of Asia, where "*the body is actually being eaten as some sort of celebration when a business deal is done.*"

This story of yet another endangered being brought me great grief, not only for the species loss of such a precious, peculiar animal, but that somehow, once again, the violent cycle of monetary power and consumptive acquisition has birthed such a destructive ritual – the sacrifice of one of the most helpless creatures of our globe. How curious to now be "feeling like a pangolin," surrounded by some of my closest friends on a sunny winter morning in the picturesque mountains of Pennsylvania. Somehow I felt the suffering of making soulful choices to live out of my own wholeness, and yet still be left, skinned alive by bankruptcy and the cultural shame and criticism that brings. The experience of helplessness had become intolerable to bear alone.

For years our family had been caught up in an international monetary business deal that was bankrupting us, freezing our assets, and us, and our precious home now belonged to the bank. How curious that although I felt trapped in the cage of poverty, at the same time I was enjoying endless benefits for my mid-to-upper class creature comforts. And even more curious, consider the reality that once I was able to muddle through and speak about all of this, once I had been witnessed by others who had no need to fix me, pull me apart, or drown me in their sympathetic attention, it was as if I escaped an invisible cage of my own making. Like Chantilly escaping his cage, I was free to be all of me – especially the wild and untamed animal-self. What a gift to be seen and known for who we are, free from shame. Free to be naked, natural, wild beings in a vast cosmic order of exquisite beauty and complexity

Wild beings are my family. I know this to be true. Maybe it is my DNA from African soil, but Chantilly was a personal messenger in a long line of earth voices. Over the past decades I have learned more from sister snake and brother bear than either of my flesh-and-blood siblings. I've hunkered on the ground and been taught by grandmother oak and granddaughter wren through every season at the home we share at Stonehaven. We are a commons there – I have discovered this reality. Together we have become a place where owl and turtle arrive as my teachers, offering their wisdom from their scat and shell, where the lotus queen first wove her sultry magic in my water-garden.

Stonehaven Commons is a place where the rocks cry out when nobody listens or pays attention. Frankly, even great-grandmother lion, who has been prowling around my bedroom windows since birth, is around here, still stalking me. She used to offer me nightmares that my terrified child had no idea what to do with, now I am not so

afraid of that underworld of fear and fantasy. In fact, this underworld story is the world of soul that calls my name and is guiding me. I am reminded of this favorite promise from Isaiah 11:16, aware I live in this promise today: "*The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the young goat. The calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child will lead them.*"

I am aware that my soul's "inner community" is rich in the diversity from early life in Angola, Zambia, and Uganda. I am also forever changed by decades of meaningful work as a spiritual leader in international faith communities, and as a healer in our Western psychological community. Now as an elder, I can say proudly and with humility that I am a global citizen. I share this planet with beings of all kinds – in a deep and complex web of relationships with both human and other-than-human community. It seems my journey has been that of an edge-walker, an adventurer around the fringes of many kinds of communal experience. To be clear though, it is in the consistent practice of showing up wholly and grounding myself in intentional circles of trust, with both human and non-human voices, that I have been given on-going clarity as to my soul's deepest name and calling.

We suffer from the confusing babble of too many voices in our era. I have followed many other voices, listened to the heartbeats of others as if they were my own, and eventually I am coming to know and recognize the "golden shadow" of my own being; she is dancing and singing to be recognized for who she is, that which she was born to be. It is clear now that, hiding in the deep underbelly of my armored pangolin being, lays the most precious treasure of darkness. It is only in showing up whole and vulnerable in all my relationships, in all my work, will I find "She Who Waits."

Thus I write today with a fresh confidence, an earthy call from this place of hidden wild energy where my passion and creativity springs. What awe – to be aware that we are all in and of this Circle together. The more I let go of my human ego story and allow the deeper and more unknown soul story to emerge, the more I find it is not just about me. It is all about us. Truly, we are all in this together.

Carol Kortsch is the author of a novel about this work, *The Retreat*, as well as a Circle of Trust facilitator. She and her husband Uli see themselves as global partners, born in Germany and Angola, together now for over 40 years. Uli and Carol moved from Canada into Stonehaven in 1992, and with the help of a team of loyal friends, bought the property from Eastern University in 2001. See that special thin place at stonehavencommons.org and reach out to her at ckortsch@global-partners.com

Soul Journey:
Living a Spiritual Life as a Black Woman in America

By Veta Goler

Watching the 2016 presidential election results the evening of November 8 was painful. It was difficult to believe what I was seeing. Eventually, I went to bed, hoping that I would awake the next morning to a miracle—a disaster averted. Instead, I awoke to what felt like a strange, yet familiar, new world, a world in which there was no longer any pretense that I, a black woman, held any value in my country.

I grieved deeply that day.

I also began searching for words that would help me make sense of this reality. How would I navigate living in a country in which so many people believed that only white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, and (probably) Christian men were deemed worthy, that they voted for someone whose words and actions were clearly vile, racist, sexist, homophobic, hostile, bigoted, small-minded and mean-spirited – decidedly not Presidential? This was especially painful after the compassionate and intelligent Presidency of Barack Obama.

I felt vulnerable in this hostile world and sought sources of peace and courage. Most of those to whom I turned for solace in my internet browsings were spiritual leaders. These included Michael Bernard Beckwith, Kryon (channeled by Lee Carroll), Deepak Chopra, Neale Donald Walsch, Lenedra Carroll, and Adironnda (channeled by Marilyn Harper). I also turned to visionaries like Sharif Abdullah and Barbara Marx Hubbard. Some referred directly to the election results. Others did not. While I found all helpful in some way, I realized that I most wanted to hear from those who could relate personally to what so many of us were facing. Beckwith, Abdullah, and Chopra are people of color; the others are not.

For a long time I've been looking for a book on new thought spirituality that includes people who look like me – that takes into account the realities of embodied life where race, gender, age, class, and ability seem to matter. I am clear that all spiritual paths and religions ultimately lead to the same place, and that the Divine (God, or whatever one wants to call the Supreme Being) is in all beings and all things and has no gender or color. However, the absence of any reference to the lived experiences of those of us who are not white, male, affluent, able-bodied, and Christian offers a not-so-hidden message that our daily realities, and therefore, our lives, are not important. And while I know that the experiences we have on the earth plane are fleeting and of less importance than our soul's journey, in order for us to devote our attention to the inner journey, which we must do for individual and planetary evolution, we must navigate and negotiate various "isms"– racism, sexism, ageism, heteronormativity, etc.– in the external world.

In other words, to attain the inner spiritual development that enables us to live as if the outer world doesn't really matter, we must face the challenges of that external world, as if it does matter. This means that for black women and other people of color, there is one more step required for spiritual growth and development. In addition to the regular challenges that all humans face as incarnated beings, black women and others must also face the various forms of oppression.

I can accept that this additional physical step provides additional opportunities for spiritual growth. And I know the journey of a spiritual being in a human body is arduous. We are required to remember again and again and again why we are here. A community can be very helpful with this. I am fortunate that I have several communities to support my journey: the meditation center I attend in Atlanta; two organizations that hold contemplation, compassion, and diversity as core values-the Center for Courage & Renewal and the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society; several online groups of new thought spiritually-minded people; and several friends with whom I regularly reflect and share are all important to me. Nevertheless, I still seek texts that address experiences of people like me directly.

Therefore, I am writing what I want to read. Hopefully, by capturing my own experiences and approaches, I will help myself—and others—to walk a spiritual path in 21st century America.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

I grew up in somewhat unusual circumstances for my time as a black girl in the U.S., with educated and professional parents (lawyer father and kindergarten teacher mother), in a small Midwest town. In my middle-class life, I had enough food to eat, a free-standing home with front and back yards, and summer vacations in northern Michigan. And I always I knew I would go to college.

Religion was and wasn't important in my upbringing. My family belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church for most of my childhood, until a disagreement with the minister led my parents to join the local Presbyterian church. There were only a few black families in the church; and while in some ways we were welcomed, in other ways, it was clear that black people didn't really belong. No one said anything hateful to my family, but during a teen workshop question and answer session, when I asked about interracial dating, I was told that I should stick to my own kind.

This was a politically powerful time in the world. The Civil Rights, Black Power, and Women's Movements were in full swing. Protests against the Vietnam War continued. Woodstock happened. On one hand, there was such hope for a changed world. On the other hand, there was such resistance to change—like now.

I knew people were working and agitating and fighting for something—for a better world for black people, women and others. But Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X were killed, as were John F. and Bobby Kennedy.

At the time hippies were talking about love. Something about love resonated with me. I came to see myself as a black hippie, a flower child, and a bridge between black and white worlds.

The moment I can identify as the dawning of my search for God took place during the summer between high school and college. By the time I graduated from high school, like many young people, I was disillusioned with so much of my daily experience, which I attributed to the immaturity of my classmates and short-sightedness of some of my teachers. I remember wondering if the whole point of life was just to accumulate experiences. I couldn't see anything beyond that. But merely accumulating experiences didn't seem very fulfilling. At the time, I didn't realize my question was spiritual; what I was really searching for was meaning. The feeling of being unsettled, of knowing there was something else going on that I couldn't identify, would return to me over the years. And later, I would see it as a search for God.

During and after college, my search manifested in decidedly "unspiritual" ways—in seeking through sex, drugs, and drama. These offered moments of feeling intensely alive. Some of these were quite vivid, yet they were always followed by a let-down. Nothing seemed to stick.

There were also some fleetingly beautiful moments that, while not sustainable, didn't have the same sense of futility. I discovered the awe of nature on my first backpacking trips, gazing at mountains, drawing pictures of the wildflowers I saw in a meadow, or simply listening to the water as I sat on a riverbank for a moment of rest.

Making music (playing piano and flute) and creating visual art (silk screening and pottery) had a similar effect. These may not have led to such awe-inspiring moments as the mountains, but the act of focusing intently and creating something beautiful was deeply fulfilling.

Eventually, I discovered modern dance. I began dancing in college and dedicated myself to it as a graduate student. Later, I came to see dance as a contemplative practice. From the moment warm-ups began, I could release whatever problems I had; I could let go of what was going on out in the world and focus my attention on the studio, my body, and the emotion or energy needed at a particular moment. Before performing, I prayed to be a vehicle for the truth and beauty of the Divine. And I believed my dancing was characterized by authenticity, forthrightness, and openness.

My first formal experience with contemplative practices took place during my sophomore year of college, when I took a Transcendental Meditation workshop just before spring-semester final exams. I began meditating right away, but I kept falling asleep when I needed to be studying for finals, so I stopped meditating almost as soon as I started. Over the years, I would try to kickstart my meditation practice, but never seemed able to sustain it, until I discovered an eastern spiritual path almost 25 years later.

My free-spirit, flower-power life led to various kinds of substance explorations. For a while, this was quite moving and a lot of fun. Eventually, however, it became clear that my drug of choice, marijuana, controlled me more than I controlled it, and I found my way to Alcoholics Anonymous. Perhaps the most important thing about attending AA meetings was the focus on a higher power. I had long ago stopped going to church, but AA brought me back to thinking about meaning. If God existed, then maybe life wasn't about feeling good or racking up experiences, after all. And this time, God wasn't in a white church, where I was tolerated, but not truly welcomed. This time, God was around people who looked like me, as well as those who didn't.

A few years after committing myself to sobriety and attending AA meetings regularly, I found my spiritual path. Once I realized that I really was a seeker of God, I dove in enthusiastically. Meditation, chanting, selfless service, and

scriptural study all consumed me. During most of my spare time, I was meditating, attending programs at my local meditation center, or traveling to ashrams in upstate New York, California, and India.

At the same time, I started reading new-age books and listening to channelings of ascended masters, anything focused on the evolution of human consciousness. Eventually, I came to see that the answers to all problems are spiritual. And I brought spirituality in the form of contemplative practices to my work. I began incorporating breathing, meditation, journaling, labyrinth walking, and other contemplative practices in my classes, offering meditation sessions for the college community and leading daylong contemplative retreats.

With this focus on contemplative practices at home and at work, I felt like I was living a spiritual life. I reminded myself to see God in other people, to recognize and challenge my own judgmentalism, and to do what I could to be an anchor of light.

But the recent presidential election shook me to my core. Immediately after the election, I sensed my personality change. I felt afraid, vulnerable, and unwelcome wherever I went, and contracted into a shell. As I moved about, I avoided making eye contact with white people. I didn't feel I could trust them.

However, two months have passed since the election and I have come to realize that nothing has really changed. The hatred and bigotry that characterized the Presidential campaign were already present and very active. And the spiritual leaders I've turned to have offered the same teachings that I already knew in my heart to be true. So I no longer feel the need to do anything new to deal with the change in leadership in the country. I simply need to remember that everything is not always as it seems and to intensify what I already do.

SOME PRACTICES FOR TODAY

Since the election, many of us have been asking the question, How then shall I live? Some people have been offering ways to become more politically active, and others, ways to spend our money more consciously by boycotting businesses and organizations that support hatred and bigotry. I am committed to those approaches as well, but am drawn to focus most on living a spiritual life. So much of what is happening today doesn't make sense to me intellectually. Humanity is making greater and greater strides with improving the lives of people through technology, legislation, and increased compassion. Consequently the right-wing bigotry, hatred, and radicalism point to a regression of human development, not evolution.

They don't make sense.

Therefore, I conclude there must be spiritual reasons for so much of what is happening

these days. And because of this, it makes the most sense for me to focus on spiritual development. To this end, I have intensified my spiritual practices. Sitting meditation is my main contemplative practice. One of the simplest, clearest definitions of meditation I've seen is that it is "substituting another object of attention for your thoughts." I may focus on my breath, a mantra, a teaching, or the inner energy I experience. But the act of returning my focus to that object of attention over and over throughout my meditation transports me to a place of connection with the source of peace, insight, creativity and strength. In addition, I am often practicing metta meditation, also known as loving kindness meditation. As I meditate, I shower others and myself with love and blessings. Perhaps most importantly, through daily meditation, as I connect again and again with the Divine, I increase my sense of self worth. My ability to love and treat others with compassion is enhanced when I can do the same for myself. Thus, whatever kind of meditation I am practicing, I am contributing to the upliftment of others, as well as myself.

Political activism is extremely important at this time, but spiritual evolution is equally, if not more, important. So, I'm committed to meditating every day. I use the Insight Timer app to time my meditation and have signed up for the 365-day meditation commitment for 2017. It is important to have a personal practice, whatever that is. Meditation works best for me because I can do it alone or with a group of people; there are lots of different ways to approach meditation, and whether I do a long meditation or a short meditation, I am able to feel my connection with God.

Another practice of mine is breathing consciously. This almost always helps me to slow down. As expected, it is as if the election gave people permission to disregard civility. Since the election, hate crimes have increased, and it seems to me that people are moving about more quickly, driving more aggressively. In part as a reaction to this, I have been focusing on my breathing and slowing down. I am moving about with more calmness and intentionality and am not giving in to frenzied ways of being. If drivers rush past me in ways that don't seem the safest, I am also reminding myself to avoid judgmentalism and to maintain my state.

I love practicing random acts of kindness. My goal is at least one random act of kindness each day. This could be holding the door for someone, paying for the drink(s) of the car behind me in the Starbucks drive-thru, giving money or food to a homeless person, or something else. At first, I was focusing my efforts on other people of color, in an effort to say, "You are valuable." Now I am including all others in my efforts.

Being on retreat is one of my most important practices. Taking time away from the daily grind to focus on reflecting, with like-minded souls, rejuvenates me. Some retreats I offer as daylong retreats for interested folks at my work. I also attend retreats for Courage & Renewal facilitators. And I am planning a series of longer retreats for

faculty of color, whether they teach at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), predominantly white institutions (PWIs), or other institutions. My experience has been that, no matter where they teach, they appreciate the opportunity to take time out for their own personal well being, which helps them when they return to work.

And finally, I firmly believe that what we consume—whether food or media—is important. Where we place our attention matters. That is why, long ago, I stopped watching violent movies and television shows. However, a few years ago, I was caught up in watching some very popular—and very violent—network television shows with black female leads. These were juicy roles for African American women and I delighted in seeing versions of myself on the small screen. Although I stopped watching these shows a year or so ago, I am recommitting myself to taking greater care of myself—and sending my own message to Hollywood—by avoiding violent television and films.

WHAT ELSE HAVE I LEARNED?

Even as I continue to walk the spiritual path, I find it helpful to reflect on the lessons I have learned. The first lesson is that human consciousness is evolving and everything is not what it seems. Scientists tell us that evolution requires challenges, difficult situations that motivate change. And while things may look a particular way on the surface, perhaps the evolutionary impulse has allowed or enabled things to happen in a certain way to create the impetus for deep change.

We are a young—and immature—species. In *New World New Mind*, Robert Ornstein and Paul Ehrlich imagine Earth's history as if it has taken place in one year. With each day representing 12 million years of actual history, the origin of the Earth would have taken place at midnight, January 1, and homo sapiens would have emerged around 11:45 PM. Amazingly, all that has happened in recorded history would have occurred in the final minute of the year! This gives me a valuable perspective on current and past events.

We have been like bratty toddlers who don't know how to play together. We are now poised to grow up a bit. And some of us are doing this more quickly than others. Some of us have developed enough to embrace higher evolutionary characteristics (like love and compassion beyond our individual families or "tribes"), while others are still focusing on survival and lower level characteristics. Eventually, we will all develop fully to enlightenment. But we are on different time frames. Those who are evolving more rapidly are helping others to evolve, through their spiritual practices and how they live their lives.

This brings me back to how to live. It is critical that those of us who are able engage in some kind of spiritual practice each day. In her wonderful book, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, Alice Walker reminds us that this is not a time to live without

a practice. I feel that so clearly; some kind of daily practice in which I connect with God is essential for my well-being and for what I can offer the planet. It doesn't matter whether or not I feel like I've connected with the Divine deeply or only superficially in my practice. It is important to do it anyway.

Love everyone. Period. I don't have to be best friends with everyone. And I may not like what someone has said or done, but viewing someone with anything but love is viewing them with fear. And fear hurts me, not them.

Ultimately, it does seem that color, gender, and other characteristics of particular individuals don't matter. However, by doing my practices and engaging in efforts to be in the present moment, without judgment, I am better able to face the challenges of living as a black woman. In this way, I become more and more free within myself, no matter what is going on in the external world. And through my own spiritual evolution, I contribute to the evolution of humanity, which will diminish and eliminate the hatred and bigotry that seem to surround us.

For me, there are no other options.

Without hope and contemplative practices, I see myself sinking into despair and depression and losing my sense of purpose. The world makes less sense if I succumb to negativity. So, even as I see and work to change the actions and systems that do not support all people, I turn within to see the divinity within me, knowing that that same divinity exists in all others.

In the October 9, 2016 episode of Oprah's *SuperSoul Sunday*, Michael Bernard Beckwith said these words that affirm the importance of living a spiritual life:

> *When you believe more in what you don't see than in what you do see, then what you **do** see, you **won't** see, and what you **don't** see, you **will** see.*

To me, Dr. Beckwith is saying that by focusing on the inner journey, we are able to look beyond the dramas that play out in daily life to the underlying spiritual realities and reasons behind them. With this foundation, we can avoid getting stuck in the daily dramas and can begin to envision a more wonderful world. And this is an important first step in making that world a reality.

The most critical thing I can do is to know my worth—deeply, from within. If other black women and I can know our value, if we can release the internalized oppression that we have consumed all of our lives, then even though racist, sexist behaviors may continue to exist, they won't have the same effect on us. We will be able to respond to them in more response-able ways—in contrast to reactive ways. And this has the power to shift things dramatically. As Neale Donald Walsch says, someone *"who walks through the world holding the Identity of Divinity deep within changes the*

exterior experiences of everyone else, everywhere she or he steps…"

As I reflect on my spiritual journey and the lessons I have learned, I realize that I already have access to what I want to read. The teachings and practices I have learned may not always have been presented to me in a way that is specific to my own cultural identity, but they are simply reminders of what my soul already knows.

That knowledge is within me.

By accessing that knowledge and honoring who I am as a person, I value myself. And as my worthiness reveals itself to me, I am able to be authentically myself. My being directs my doing so that I stand tall, live my truth, and help usher in a new world, a world that works for all.

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Living Alive on the Frontier

By Elaine Sullivan

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn
anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive
is too small for you.

--David Whyte

I heard the poet David Whyte speak about living on the frontier of life, being at the frontier of your identity. The image touched me and helped me reawaken my imagination and reflect on my life at this time of challenge as I watch my beloved husband slowly slip away from me.

Whyte uses the image of the frontier to mean that place on the edge of our identity where we meet the Self we didn't know we knew. He said that when he began to realize that *"my identity depended not upon any beliefs I had, inherited beliefs or manufactured beliefs, but my identity actually depended on how much attention I was paying to things that were other than myself. And that as you deepen this intentionality*

and this attention, you started to broaden and deepen your own sense of presence. And I began to realize that the only place where things were actually real was at this frontier between what you think is you and what you think is not you. That whatever you desire of the world will not come to pass exactly as you will like it.

"But the other mercy is that whatever the world desires of you will also not come to pass. And what actually occurs is this meeting, this frontier. But it's astonishing how much time human beings spend away from that frontier, abstracting themselves out of their bodies, out of their direct experience, and out of a deeper, broader, and wider possible future that's waiting for them if they hold the conversation at that frontier level" (interview with Krista Tippett, http://www.onbeing.org/program/david-whyte-the-conversational-nature-of-reality/transcript/8581).

I reflected in my journal on what it means to live fully in and on that frontier:

Living on the frontier of life

I can refuse to be myself - I can step out on to the edge
I can fully incarnate in the frontier I find myself
I can stand on solid ground and reach for the intangible nature of this frontier
I can discipline myself and seek a language that supports my darkness
I can find a courageous way of living in this beautiful and difficult world
My home is so close to me, everything a numinous call to the depth of this frontier.
Courageously I place my identity at the edge of discovery and remembering.
On the new frontier I hear myself speak about things I did not know I knew
I reimagine myself - I renew myself - I rediscover myself - I hear my own truth.

After more than 80 years of living, you would think there would be no more new frontiers. But I find myself at one of the most difficult edges so far as I am literally losing my dear husband of forty-four years after severe memory loss from several mini-strokes. ***On the new frontier, I hear myself speak about things I did not know I knew. I reimagine myself. I renew myself. I rediscover myself. I hear my own truth.***

Much of the work of my life has been helping others find the power and meaning of their own stories. Now, as I remember the many frontiers of my life, I am making meaning from my own story. And I realize that, this time as I navigate this difficult world, I have a gift that wasn't as evident on early frontiers: the trustworthiness of my Kirkridge Courage Fellowship community.

The invitation to the Kirkridge Fellowship was a surprise in my 80th year, when I wasn't really anticipating a new frontier. Arriving at Kirkridge Retreat Center in the Pocono

Mountains of Pennsylvania, I again experienced what I had felt at this special place many years before: a profound peace, a sense of being at home. The spirit of a man I loved and admired, Dan Berrigan, seemed pervasive as did the spirit of this place where many have found renewal, hope and community. This commitment to a community who would be together over a two-year span was indeed a blessed frontier.

Words from Joyce Rupp's poem, *Old Maps*, shared in that first retreat, linger in my soul:

No map, no specific directions,
no "this way ahead" or "take a left."
How will I know where to go?
How will I find my way? no map!
But then my midlife soul whispers:
"there was a time before maps
when pilgrims traveled by the stars."

It is time for the pilgrim in me
to travel in the dark,
to learn to read the stars
that shine in my soul.
I will walk deeper
into the dark of my night.
I will wait for the stars.
Trust their guidance,
And let their light be enough for me.

In this challenging new frontier, I was truly a pilgrim letting go of old maps and traveling more deeply into the dark of my night. Supported by a loving, caring community of colleagues, I made discoveries about myself, was invited to share my approaches to this work, learned incredible wisdom from our community, and found myself alive with the sounds of the soulful space of Kirkridge. The poet in me was reawakened, and I discovered bread for my journey. As I traveled this frontier I reflected on what this work has done for me. Now, re-reading parts of my journal, I know that what I need is already here.

Community is a gift to be received,
It begins in the recesses of my heart,
Community is my crucible,
my commitment to be refined by fire.
I know what I have to do
though voices around me keep shouting bad advice.
It is late –
the darkness is deep –

a wild night –
the road is full of strewn branches and stones.
Little by little I leave those voices behind.
The stars begin to burn through sheets of clouds
and there is a new voice…..
I am in the crucible of my community
with people who have collaborated in dreaming,
in thinking wild thoughts
about funding and invitations,
about creating safe spaces,
about facilitation of this work,
with people who have taken courageous risks,
inviting me to be a castaway on my own island,
discovering my own inner teacher,
my own drum, my own heartbeat.
I will remember that community is found
in the recesses of my heart,
in the recesses of your hearts.
Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
Bring your Wilson – I'll bring mine
As we travel together, with the Great Spirit
on the Mobius Trail.

MY FIRST FRONTIER

The Texas Panhandle was my first frontier eighty-one years ago. There under the wide open spaces and the brilliant stars I lived through many seasons: brutal winters when the cold reminded me of the rope tied to the barn, surprising springs when the new green shoots came through the muddy earth, long summer days of watching crops grow and gardens bear fruit, and the most fruitful falls when the harvest was gathered. As children we lived by the seasons. Though we were very poor we were extremely rich. At night the vast sky was ours as we lay on the ground finding our stars, and during the day the earth offered many opportunities for our playful imaginations. Living in that frontier, the relationship to family, to the church, to God, and to our small community was the essence of my life.

During this time I heard the small still voice in my soul calling. At the very young age of fifteen, I entered a Benedictine convent, even though that meant leaving my home,

my community, and my security. Words from my journal speak my truth:

If I can let go as my tree lets go its leaves,
So casually, one by one
If I can take the dark with open eyes
And call it seasonal
If I can find within me a silence –
A silence as vast as a universe,
If I can find that silence
And remember who I am.
Silence is my deepest nature, my home.
Silence reveals – silence heals,
Silence brings me to the real work –
the roots of my being.
Silence invites me to hear the voice within
So that I know what I have to do.

Being called to a new frontier at such a young age presented me with many challenges. I felt the utter loneliness of being five hundred miles from my family: Mom, Dad, and eight siblings whom I dearly loved. Part of this new frontier was learning to live the disciplined life of a nun. Over time I learned the art of deep meditation, the meaning of silence (very difficult for me who was a chatter box), the chanting of the Divine Office throughout the day and evening, simple recreation, simple foods, hours of spiritual reading and the challenge of living in community which is the heart of the Benedictine Way. I lived my way into the questions concerning this vocation. In very dark times I wondered what I was doing with my life and at times I considered leaving. My journaling speaks to the seasons I experienced:

Seasons of my soul, rich in paradox,
What is growing in me will die,
What is seeding will blossom.
My work, my willingness to go into my deepest dazzling darkness,
To visit the unknown spaces in my heart and soul,
To be willing to embrace my hurt, my fear,
My saboteur, my victim, my healer,
My magician, my seasonal gifts.
To know that in that embrace I am whole.
To visit in autumn the seeds of my true Self.
As I am willing to let go of things so dear to my ego,
To embrace my winters
Where I experience the darkness and the dormancy.

To dance my springs –
The inevitable seeds of new life yearning to be born.
To celebrate my summers aware of the abundance
In my life as I acknowledge my fears of scarcity.
Yes, there is in me a deeper Self
That loves paradox even as I seek comfort in certainty.
My seasonal paradoxes invite me
To do my inner work –
To get past my ego into the deep dazzling darkness within.
Remembering, recalling the power of the mobius
What is inside me – my darkness and my light
Always being projected on to my world.
What is outside of me is always affecting my inner world.
I stand grounded on the earth
As I listen to the deep waters of my soul.

ANOTHER FRONTIER: THE CALL OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM

At age eighteen I was thrust into a new frontier which demanded so much growth and so much maturity. I was sent to an African American school to teach. It was pre-civil rights. Having grown up in an all-white community, I had no idea what I would learn in this new environment. I had forty children in grades three, four and five and no training around teaching. I knew in that first year I was born to teach and relished what each new day taught me. My children used separate bathrooms and were isolated in balcony seats because of the color of their skin. I was devastated. How could this be? It was during this time that becoming a social activist to right these injustices took center stage of my life. Words from my journal remind me of my deep gratitude for the call to this new frontier:

I am living my life.
I will make a difference.
I have stood on the silent river of ice.
I have listened to the currents of my life coming from miles away.
I have asked myself whether the life
I'm living is the one that wants to live in me.
I know that what I strive for in perfection is not
what turns me into the lit angel.

What disturbs me and what nourishes me has everything I need.
Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes to recognize its own.
The night gives me a horizon further that I can see.
The dark is my womb.
I own my weakness and my strength,
my liability and my giftedness,
my darkness and my light.

Wintering through my story, I'm discovering my voice.
I am becoming fierce with reality.
I hear the sprout hidden in the seed.
I am learning I can be everything by simply listening.
Like the woodcarver, I guard my spirit,
do not expend it on trifles.
I slow down. I pay attention.
If I am not so single-minded about keeping my life in motion,
if I make peace with the wars inside me,
if I for once would do nothing,
perhaps a great silence – a winter's silence –
a compassionate connecting silence,
a silence that would lead me to otherness,
would be enough for the new life I must and will call my own.

I left that school at age twenty-one when I was sent to be principal of a small school in Arkansas. Martin Luther King was sounding his powerful message in the media. I was deeply moved by his work and sought to bring his message to our school.

Resistance was all around me.

I was fearless due to remembering my students from my first school. I spoke out in public meetings in this community and challenged the status quo. Because I had good relationships with the parents in my school, I found the courage to challenge. During this time our country experienced the marches in Selma and many other non-violent protests. The mood was tense, and I felt it in the very fabric of my being. Again my journals reminded me of my feelings on that frontier:

I know a deep commitment to making the world more beautiful
is growing in me.
I recognize my coward and my procrastinator.
I know my garden of flowers – one clearly lopsided –
another half nibbled away.

But what in this world is perfect?
I want to be whole, not perfect.
My world is more beautiful, more dazzling
because I see the hidden wholeness in me and in another.
I commit to guarding my spirit against trifles –
To make the world more beautiful
by believing that imperfections are nothing – that light is everything –
That it is more than the sum of each flawed blossom rising and fading.
I will become god to even the palest of flowers within.
I will honor and nurture the green stone – my heart energy –
the greening of my heart.
My soul looks into the white fire of a great mystery.
My heart is pounding.
I will not die an unlived life.
A perfect sweetness has blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

MEETING MYSELF ON THE FRONTIER

"So in other words, whatever you want to happen, will not happen," David Whyte says about being on the frontier. *"But equally, whatever the world wants to happen for you will not happen either. And what happens is this meeting. And it's in that meeting that you overhear yourself being surprised by your reality, by the larger context that you haven't yet explored. So you're trying to overhear your Self whom you didn't know you knew. And you're trying to speak it out loud in the world so it can be known consciously. There should be a lovely sense of surprise when you're working at that edge and a sense of being gifted."* (from Tami Simon's interview with David Whyte, http://www.soundstrue.com/store/weeklywisdom/?page=single&category=IATE&episode=1641)

That lovely sense of surprise came when I was given an opportunity to take a break from teaching and go fulltime to school at Loyola University in Chicago to become a social worker. I was there when Martin Luther King was assassinated. The next day, on Palm Sunday, I took the bus into the inner city of Chicago which was awash with fire and protests. With many volunteers I worked among the very poor giving out food and clothing.

That incredible experience changed my life, and I went back to the University and changed my major to education and entered a new frontier. I heard the call deep in my heart: Do what you can to change attitudes, open hearts and help people see with new eyes. That day in Chicago my heart was broken, broken open to seeing new possibilities. I promised to live non-violently and to give voice to what I knew:

I don't have to be good;
I want to be whole – embrace my hidden wholeness.
What I have become
Is the country where I live.
The world offers itself to my imagination.
Some seed in me awkwardly awakens,
Stirs to life.
Terrible and instinctive
It touches my guts.
I fear and resist it.
I run madly, busy myself, overload my plate.
What I fear and desire
Pokes up its head.
The root struts from the seed
In the earth's darkness, my darkness, my Shadow.
I confirm in my very marrow the paradoxes of my inner life –
Strengths and weaknesses, wounds and gifts.
I cannot see the shape of what wants to be born.
I don't know its nature.
But just underground is the long avoided latency.
It may be that when I no longer know what to do
I have come to my real work.
That when I no longer know which way to go
I will have come to my real journey.
I have fewer answers now – more wonderings.
I wonder about my harvest
And the feast at the edge of my sleep.
I wonder in silence,
In solitude in nature, in relationship.
I know I have a place in the family of things.
Darkened, I am carried out of need, deep
Into the country I have married.
I am home.

When I graduated with a Masters in Counseling and Education, I was invited into the PhD program but decided I wanted to go study with teachers and leaders who would offer me the opportunity to know myself, to discover who I was. For years I have studied with incredible teachers and have never regretted not having a doctor before my name because I realize what an incredible inner journey I was invited to take with so many mentors. I loved synthesizing the specialties of so many in the field of transformational work. I was invited to step on the edge of many internal frontiers:

Above these Taos mountains the blue skies hold
the silhouettes of white moving clouds.
I search for the one line inscribed across the heavens so I can find the one line written inside of me.
It took this great New Mexico sky to find that small, bright indescribable wedge of freedom in my heart.
That line rediscovered and reclaimed – you have within you a hidden wholeness
holding the fire of passion – the groundedness of earth,
the water of life, and the breath of the spirit.
Sifting through the ashes when the fire has gone out,
Sifting through so many layers this week in Taos,
I have found new creative parts of myself.
I am not leaving this experience – I am arriving at another way of knowing that who I am speaks louder than anything I say.
I recommit to my soul-work, to the lines already written in my heart,
that ancient place where my will, my intellect, my emotions converge.
This is my journey.

After grad school I went to work at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point, where my frontier shifted. During this time I left the convent and began to find my way as a single thirty-three-year-old in a world I had never known. It was truly a time of living in the in-between.

It was there that I became involved in the Wellness Movement. The University hosted the first Wellness Conference in this country. Last year we celebrated our fortieth anniversary. I served on the Board of Directors for years and worked on the integration of mind, body and spirit as the core of wellness throughout the US and Canada. My gift to this conference was my work with the power of knowing and owning our own story. This was back in the seventies when there was nothing written about story.

Some of my fondest memories of these years were being called *touch/feely* and *out of touch* and *crazy lady*. I never minded because I had learned the power of story from my own beautiful students. I started story-telling workshops with the students at the university. I offered three-hour sessions where the students would share in small and large groups. We had problems with eighteen-year-olds at bars trying to meet folks. My workshops became well-known, and soon I was offering them three evenings a week. I was deeply moved by the openness and the sharing that occurred.

MARRIAGE: THE NEW FRONTIER

At the university I met Joe, who was the leader of the Catholic Newman Center on campus. We led many retreats together. Later he left the priesthood and a few years

later we were married. Marriage was the new frontier in 1972 in Chicago, Illinois, where Joe and I were both employed in education.

While in Chicago we were blessed with two beautiful children, a joy beyond our deepest imagination. (And now we have four delightful grandchildren who are our greatest gifts). We loved being parents and balancing our work life with our marriage and our new family. This new frontier offered many possibilities for personal growth and development. Living in intimacy opened up the hidden caverns of my soul. We each had our own baggage, and as we moved down the road of marriage, we sought help to heal the old and deepest wounds we carried. This frontier offered shadow work as well as claiming our light:

My summer tree – full of abundance
the dead leaves are gone
green – shiny – stately.
The sun strokes your leaves with
his old buttery fingers.
I have hurried into this place
to be with you, to exclaim your dearness,
to reflect on my journey,
To remember my dark, underground cities,
to remember it is there where the beauty,
the exemplary are waiting to blaze open.
Down there in my depths
I have struck a great thing.
I sit here in silence
with my summer tree abundantly full.
Has everything happened
and I am now standing, quietly, in a new life?
Unfinished tapestry –
stories in thread – my history
Images of yesterday –
my tree in autumn colors, winter's dead leaves –
spring's budding and today
I stand on holy ground – the wind sings through my tree
like a breath of God awakening me to the sacred present,
This abundance – I have more than enough
to be all I can be.

In Chicago I was blessed with a career at a community college where my vice-president asked me to do something to help women who wanted to return or come to college. I took a course that was on the books called Psychology of Personal Growth and

designed it for women who would come and spend sixteen weeks writing and sharing their life stories. By my fourth semester I was offering twelve sections of the class, and I was training faculty to hold safe space for this work. Little did I know what I was embarking on: the depth, the pain, the repression, the secrets, the joys, the dreams, the emotional abuse, the sexual abuse, the loss and grief… No one had prepared me for these encounters.

What I learned is that when women felt safe they shared what was deep in their hearts and souls and somewhere in that experience became more authentic with who they were. Deep and abiding friendships were made and kept through the years. I was being challenged to grow in every aspect of my being: emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and socially. Every fiber of my being was alive and I became passionate about the work. I was criticized by colleagues who believed education was about objective reality and that my class was fluff. When two faculty went to the Board to get me to drop that course, my women students helped unseat the Board member. I never had any more problems.

I have taught that class for over forty years and read and studied over 2500 written autobiographies. Here I learned what lies hidden in the hearts and souls of many incredible people. This frontier opened my heart and soul to the depth of my own story and to the importance of deep inner work, and I reflected in my journal:

I, like Adam, part the veil to see with
New eyes this garden entrusted to me.
Flowing water circled with scum and debris,
Multiple bluebonnets decorated with specks of pink
Lay by dead weeds and enormous dandelions.
Redbuds bursting into green, green leaves
Trees in every shade of green – pale
Newborn green – dark, deepened green.
Grasses covered in tiny pink flowers and multiple dandelions
Rocks, stones, covered with green, green moss in my inner garden.
Debris and scum swept away in the art of forgiveness
My trees' dead leaves and limbs – only a few – to invite deeper
awareness of the deadness in the garden of my soul.
Let the wind call for my jasmine – I will not weep.
This garden entrusted to my care – I will till, water, weed and embrace.
My tree dripping with seeds of possibility
I will not sacrifice to the wind.
The garden of my heart is opening to receive and to give
Is open to join with other hearts across this larger garden –To know and own the
violence, the warring parts of myself – the paradoxes of my soul –

to bring peace to my world.
To see the world from the eye of my heart,
To hear the world from the ear of my heart,
To be unafraid of the relentless teachers of my heart.

My next frontier was Dallas, Texas, where my husband became vice president of a college. The transition to Dallas was the most painful in my life. In Chicago I had just finished eleven years of teaching a class entitled *Women in Transition.* Now I was a woman in transition; lost, grieving, hating the move, no friends or family, two small children, new doctors, new neighbors. I suddenly realized that what I had been teaching from my head was now being felt deeply and powerfully in my soul. Now I personally experienced the power of transition to open my heart to new possibilities.

Through the grief and darkness, through the tears and struggles, through slowly moving forward, I found myself again. I was, again, blessed with a career at another community college where I continued my work with written stories. Working at my college offered me the challenge of deepening who I was and speaking my truth. At the college we had what we named an "un-committee," which was established by our president as a way of inviting connections across all disciplines. We read one book a month. The greatest gift from that experience was to meet Parker Palmer in his book, *To Know As We Are Known.* I felt I finally had a friend, someone who understood the value of subjective knowing and the importance of balancing both objective and subjective knowing. I carried his book like a bible, reading and reading what he wrote. I knew I had a colleague in higher education who would understand and appreciate the work I had been doing against all odds for many years. I made up my mind that, if I ever had a chance, I would go study with Parker.

AGE 55: A SPECIAL FRONTIER

A special frontier appeared at the college when I turned 55. I was working with a program for people from age 25 to 55. Suddenly I realized I was not close to death and neither were many folks in our community. With the support of a wonderful president I started a program for folks 55+ called the Emeritus program. It took on a life of its own, and I quickly realized what it meant for older people to write and share their life stories, to have the opportunity to study and learn with younger people.

Perhaps more than any other frontier, this one taught me about attitudes toward aging, the importance of meaning for older adults, the value of learning and stretching. I watched folks in their seventies walk across the stage at graduation having completed their first degree. What joy!

Several years later when I was presenting a workshop at the National Wellness Conference on the power of story where I mentioned Parker Palmer's work, I met a

woman from the Fetzer Institute who wanted me to know that Parker was working with the Fetzer Institute and would be offering workshops. I was thrilled! As the universe works I was invited with a group of my colleagues to go to a retreat with Parker at the Fetzer Institute. From that workshop we wrote a book, *To Teach with Soft Eyes*, essays on how we would bring Parker's ideas to the classroom.

This was the beginning of one of the most significant frontiers of my life. Nothing I had ever done compared with what I was learning from the work of Parker Palmer. I was being invited to enter the labyrinth of my life, to take the journey down into the paradoxes of my own identity and integrity: wounds and gifts, shadow and light, strength and weakness, limitations and possibilities. I found myself standing on solid ground, knowing I was truly home. I read, studied, discussed, meditated-just could not get enough of this approach to the inner journey.

Then another miracle and another opportunity presented itself. I was invited to the Fetzer Institute to participate with 30 others from across the country in a retreat offered by the Center for Courage & Renewal. I went home so grateful but with a somewhat heavy heart because the Center would be selecting ten people to continue training with Parker and staff for a year, and I knew I would not be one of them. I was totally astounded when I received an invitation to become part of that training, allowing me to study for one year with ten colleagues who would meet at Parker's home in Madison, Wisconsin. This was, indeed, a new frontier, an invitation to engage in soul work in ways I had never encountered. I cherished the challenge and slowly grew into the principles and practices of what we then called formation work.

Somewhere I am awakening to something deep within myself.
The images of spring have so much to tell me about my life.
I am the black bear. I come down from the mountain each morning.
How do I love the world!
How do I let go of the praise and order of my life
in new and different ways?
How will I take the images of spring
and make them real for myself?
I know my tree is still holding on to its leaves –
Afraid of letting them go –
And yet new life is bursting on this same tree.
Where are my cracks?
How do I find new perspectives in the paradoxes of spring?
I must take time for silence and prayer.
I will miss the dazzling darkness of my own life
If I refuse to take time to sit with my victim –
Sometimes I play such a great martyr.

Oh, leaf that is one that must go – must be released.
I forget to love the world – to love what is –
To remember how a flower becomes what it is meant to be –
How it opens itself to the sun, rain,
How it bends with the wind.
Crack me open!
Crack open my heart!
Let my lips caress the taste of life.
Let my eyes see and my ears hear
The spring of my life.

Though I had retired from the college, I was invited, at Parker's suggestion, to work in the newly-created Center for Formation in Community Colleges, which had received a grant from Fetzer to continue this work with teachers in higher education. Opening up a new frontier with many challenges, many unknowns and many possibilities, we prepared facilitators to hold formation retreats at their colleges.

This frontier, perhaps more than others, demanded that I do my own inner work, that I become clear about my own identity and integrity. Story, poetry, metaphor, and imagery became my bread and nurtured my soul. I had the opportunity to work with John O'Donohue and David Whyte, who opened my imagination and offered me opportunities I never knew existed. The more I engaged in the work, the more I realized how I and many others had been schooled out of our imagination. All the other frontiers of my life seemed to have led me to this work I have now loved for more than 18 years, preparing facilitators and mentoring them in this work.

And then, when I turned eighty, I was surprised again by the invitation to apply for the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program. After reflecting and meditating, I decided to apply. I was thrilled when I received the news of my acceptance. This was indeed, a new frontier, a time for me to step back and pay attention to my own life. How authentic am I really? How is my life speaking? In my journal I wrote:

You don't have to be good, you can be whole,
A leaf with life and death – a leaf in full bloom
Yet severed from the tree.
In this autumn of your life you can celebrate
And thank God for your life.
Simple leaf, among thousands of leaves,
I chose you to remember.
Remember the strong life-line that courses through you –
Never broken – my own deep faith even in dark times.
I see your brokenness and I remember times of letting go –

Feeling broken – finding my way through.
You hold for me the deep memories of childhood –
Convent, marriage, career and moving into the last part
of my life on this earth.
I notice the curl at the end even though you are still green.
Teach me the art of wonder, of mystery in these years.
I feel my age - with hearing loss, eye problems, stiff joints –
And I want to continue to live in this world, not merely visit.
Teach me to hold on for dear life
And gently let go when the time comes.
In this last quarter of my life I want to walk in the rain,
Ride more rapids, climb a mountain – see more clearly.
I want to live the life that wants to live in me.
I want to know more clearly what the river says.
I want to lose what I need to lose, to keep what I can keep.
I want to take the dark with open eyes and call it seasonal.
I want to hold you, precious leaf,
As you lend yourself to my imagination.
I don't want to be good – I long to be whole –
Accepting all of who I am.
You are just what you were created to be – a leaf –
A special leaf, among thousands of leaves.
So be it.

Elaine Sullivan is a licensed professional counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist. She is a consultant and has been a facilitator of Courage Work for almost 20 years. She prepares facilitators for this work through the Center for Renewal and Wholeness in Higher Education. Elaine lives in Dallas, Texas, and can be contacted at elainemsullivan34@gmail.com – and she invites you to visit her website, www.sullivanconsultingandcounseling.com

SECTION 3

Seeking the Courage to Create a Circle of Trust And Reclaim the Commons

Here is one way to understand the relationships in a circle of trust: they combine unconditional love, or regard, with hopeful expectancy, creating a space that both safeguards and encourages the inner journey. In such a space, we are freed to hear our own truth, touch what brings us joy, become self-critical about our faults, and take risky steps toward change—

--Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

Insight by Parker J. Palmer

Why We Need Circles of Trust

Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places. I learned about these qualities during my bouts with depression. In that deadly darkness, the faculties I had always depended on collapsed. My intellect was useless; my emotions were dead; my will was impotent; my ego was shattered. But from time to time, deep in the thickets of my inner wilderness, I could sense the presence of something that knew how to stay alive even when the rest of me wanted to die. That something was my tough and tenacious soul.

Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye - but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.

Unfortunately, community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away. In spaces ranging from congregations to classrooms, we preach and teach, assert and argue, claim and proclaim, admonish and advise, and generally behave in ways that drive everything original and wild into hiding. Under these conditions, the intellect, emotions, will and ego may emerge, but not the soul: we scare off all the soulful things, like respectful relationships, goodwill, and hope.

A circle of trust is a group of people who know how to sit quietly "in the woods" with each other and wait for the shy soul to show up... In such a space, we are freed to hear our own truth, touch what brings us joy, become self-critical about our faults, and take risky steps toward change - knowing that we will be accepted no matter what the outcome.

Parker J. Palmer is a writer, teacher and activist who works independently on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality, and social change. Founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal, he has authored nine books, including *The Courage to Teach, Let Your Life Speak, A Hidden Wholeness,* and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. He holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley, and thirteen honorary doctorates.

MEETING THE AUTHORS

Caryl Lea Menkhus Creswell: I feel most alive when I am being with my twin sister, my children, grandchildren, and husband; when I am sharing Godly Play and Courage Work with others and being in one of those circles myself; on hikes in the Northwest and daily walks; with Beauty and Creativity. I say that my Work in the world is paying attention and helping others pay attention. I am a Quaker seeker. I have been a Godly Play practitioner and trainer for almost 20 years nationally and internationally. I am so fortunate to be able to do both Godly Play trainings and facilitate Courage Work together with my husband, Jeff Creswell.

Debbie Stanley: *I feel most alive when I am teaching and learning; sailing and snorkeling; singing and praying. My work in the world is to be a witness to life in the roles of teacher, minister, and friend. The commandment "Love thy neighbor" saves me daily. My neighbors, in all their forms and in all their places, amaze me and cause me to turn to wonder and practice loving in the most unique ways. Writing my story to share with you has provided the safe space for me to find words to utter what my soul has been telling me all along… I laughed, cried, felt angry, and received peace.*

James R. Sims: Please call me Jim. I feel most alive when I am given the opportunity for intimate conversation. The chance to talk about important things with people is life-giving to me. I long to hear about what matters to folks and share with them what matters to me. At this point in my life, my "Work" has become acting and responding with Love in every moment. I fall short of that intention so often, but I believe that it is the nature of Love to forgive me while encouraging and challenging me with more and more opportunities to live out my longing. Whether it is through my writing, or my music and lyrics, I hope that my readers and listeners get a sense of common ground – of comfortable familiarity – whether I am in the midst of hope or despair, of sadness or joy. And I also think it would be OK if they come away with the feeling that I am a fairly nice person and, given the opportunity, they would like to get to know me better.

Megan LeBoutillier: *I feel alive walking in nature with my dog, learning new things, making things, creating beauty, being in this Fellowship, teaching, exploring with color. I am a writer and an artist as well as a facilitator for Circles of Trust. I am a curious observer of this world. I am an independent learner and avid reader. I am a shy introvert and like to see myself as having a strong spiritual aspect. I am a writer so the process of writing my story for this book felt familiar, but as always I was surprised by what showed up on the page. I always say that I write what I need to read and often I don't know what that is until it has emerged. The process is mysterious and thrilling.*

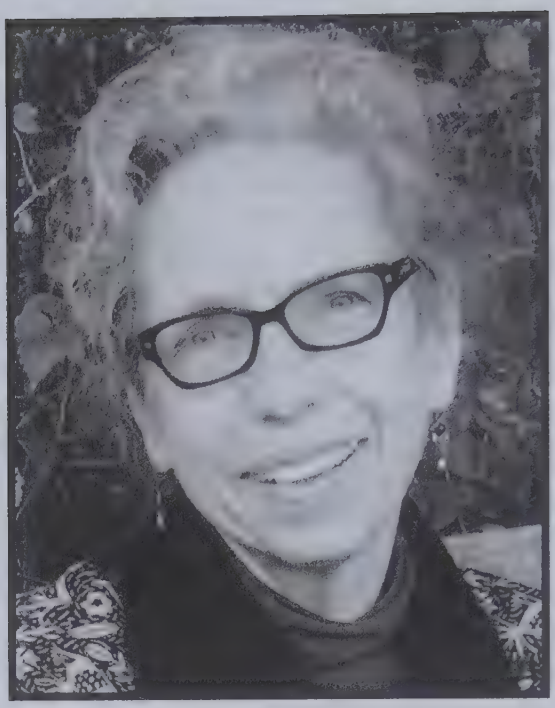
Jeffrey M. Creswell: I feel most alive when I am outside in the natural world paying attention with reverence. I also feel most alive when I am with people who are open and vulnerable. My Work in the world is teaching and learning and loving the people and the world around me. I have an amazing loving family consisting of my wife, Caryl, and eight children, four grandchildren, and lots of siblings and their families. I feel honored to be invited to share my story in this book about a retreat experience that was significant and life-changing for me.

Vicki Metzgar: *I feel most alive when I am in nature, with friends and family, and enjoying an active endeavor, like hiking or a campfire conversation (like a Circle of Trust). My Work in the world is changing as I enter retirement from a formal career in education to an informal, but no less important, role as "responsible citizen of Earth." This role takes on many manifestations, from serving as president of my HOA to political activism on behalf of minorities of all kinds, including the Earth and its plant and animal inhabitants. I am, like you, curious and open to ideas and thoughts that challenge me to examine myself and the world around me, find my place among all things, and work to bring justice and peace to this imperfect and wounded, yet wonder-filled world.*

Linda Pololi: My research and work with the professional and personal development of faculty in academic medicine, including women and members of underrepresented minority groups, make me feel alive. I believe strongly in an evidence-based collaborative group approach to mentoring and leadership development for medical faculty - I feel personally fulfilled when facilitating these programs, where I get in close with the faculty and witness them being authentic and thriving. I am honored that my recent multi-institutional research on the academic medical environment showed the importance of the "culture" to faculty vitality, challenging academic leaders to be change agents. Both my work and my personal life sustain my aliveness. I love to spend time with my two sons and my husband, and relish walking in the countryside and on the beach with them. I also experience deep pleasure when listening to music and painting, and most of all, I find loving and learning exciting.

Jean Richardson: *I feel most alive when I am being with friends and family, enjoying a good meal at our dining room table, kayaking in the early morning, pondering how to change the world just a bit toward kindness, and being a part of the Kirkridge Fellowship. As the director of a retreat center, I hold and create space for individuals (and myself) to do creative, loving justice work in their communities and the world. I love to create. I love to create safe space, ideas, possibilities, food, art, and ways to play. Writing my story for this book has helped me clarify my thoughts about my Work and why I feel so passionately about my life as the director of Kirkridge Retreat Center.*

Susan Nodurft: What makes me feel alive is living in relationship with self and the world around me. I especially love spending time with my family, hiking and kayaking in wild places, and sharing my home with three spoiled dogs. At this stage of life my Work has increasingly become listening and acting on what calls my heart. Courage Work and teaching tai chi are expressions of the heart that bring great joy. I live in gratitude for each moment of life. Though I don't consider myself a writer, composing this essay turned out to be a gift received, as well as offered.



The Dance of Creating Safe Space

By Caryl Lea Menkhus Creswell

One of the many gifts of the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship has been to be in the Circle with some of the original facilitators, having their perspective and hearing their stories of the beginning days of this work. We have heard and need to hear over and over our founding story of how this work was birthed and nurtured.

One of the pilot facilitators, Sally Z. Hare, has periodically shared her memories of those very first Courage to Teach Circles and given us a glimpse of those fledgling and formative times. I have especially found it interesting to hear the story of how the Touchstones came to be essential guidelines for this work. I remember being quite amused and surprised the first time Sally told us the story of the different perspectives regarding the inclusion of the touchstones, first offered by Judy Brown, another of the pilot facilitators in those beginning days. In those first Courage circles there was actually some uncertainty as to how important they really were and even whether they were all necessary. And yet, in Sally's first two-year retreat series, she found the Touchstones in particular (which she re-named Boundary Markers) to be of huge importance to those first participants.

Over the ensuing years, the Touchstones have been revised and edited and modified

but never lost. They have remained a critical component of Courage Work. I personally have often experienced and witnessed a communal sigh of relief when these are presented at the beginning of a Courage Circle. Participants have said that it was when the Touchstones were read that they were able to let go of their apprehensions and were assured that this time together would be a safe place.

Some lists have been condensed and name just the essence:

- *Extend and receive welcome.*
- *Be present as fully as possible.*
- *What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.*
- *Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.*
- *No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting each other.*
- *Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions.*
- *When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.*
- *Attend to your own inner teacher.*
- *Trust and learn from the silence.*
- *Observe deep confidentiality.*
- *Know that it's possible to leave with whatever it is that you need.*

Other lists fill up several pages with explanations and definitions of each Touchstone. Regardless of the length or format, facilitators believe they are essential for building the container in which we do this work. We always, **always,** begin with these. They serve as the guideposts and boundary markers to show us the way and keep our circles safe. In my own journey working with these markers, I have come to recognize their value and contribution in other settings as well. Any work that respects the need to provide safe places where people are invited to listen deeply to themselves in community can benefit from using these Boundary Markers. These Touchstones have become an integral part of other work that I do, ensuring its health and integrity.

One of the areas where Courage Touchstones have made a significant contribution is in the work I do with *Godly Play*, a Montessori-based program that deeply respects and honors the innate spirituality of children. It is not unlike Courage work in that its core philosophy is that we (especially children) already have "that of God" within us. What we don't have is the language (or the space) to speak about it. Both in practicing *Godly Play* personally and in the training of adults nationally and internationally, the Touchstones have become an integral part of noticing, naming, and nurturing what is essential in this work. They help to create a safe place for children (and adults) to be encouraged to pay attention. These boundary markers make it safe for the inner teacher to show up.

Following is a brief outline of a Godly Play session side by side with the Touchstones showing how they support and inform what is happening.

"Are you ready?" I'm asked as I'm greeted by name, welcomed and invited by the doorkeeper to cross the threshold into the Godly Play room. I recognize with this question that I need to prepare, to slow down and open my heart and check myself to see if I am ready. "Yes, I am ready." I step across the threshold and enter another space. I am greeted again by the storyteller and invited to join the circle. There is a calm anticipation and a familiar comfort to the forming of the circle. I take my place and make room for others to take their place. There is room for everyone... a place just for you...a place for who you really are...and a community that welcomes you.

• ***Extend and receive welcome.*** People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality

This invitation is about bringing my whole self to the circle and choosing to be present as authentically and accurately as possible.

• ***Be present as fully as possible.*** **Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.**

Narrative: The storyteller opens a box and places an ancient story in the middle of the circle – everyone has equal access. The universal value of story (through narrative, poetry, art, music, etc.) is that it allows me to listen to my own story. There is an economy of words and an economy of gestures so that there is uncluttered and open access to the story. No eye contact from the storyteller allows me to focus on and enter the story. There are frequent and comfortable spaces of silence, held without filling them with words and gestures. It takes a courageous storyteller to not fill up the spaces.

• ***Trust and learn from the silence.*** **Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.**

• ***No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.*** **This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the "helping professions." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.**

I'm not told what the moral or the point of the story is. There is no interpretation, advice, or correcting – trusting each of us to find and make our own meaning.

At the very heart of all of this is the deep conviction of and respect for that inner light in everyone, however one chooses to name it: soul, true self, inner teacher, spark of the divine, that of God...however it is understood.

From that primary and fundamental conviction I, along with the other members of the circle, are asked open, honest questions that encourage us to hear ourselves and our own inner teacher. There is no coercion, only invitation.

The first question that comes is, "I wonder what part of this story you liked best?" What a safe question! No right or wrong answer required. And whether I am aware of it or not, I am paying attention to what I liked -- not what someone else expects me to like. It is followed by, "I wonder what part of this story is the most important part?" and "I wonder where you are in this story?" Questions again that help me hear and pay attention to my own self and not what someone else expects.

The final question, "I wonder what we can leave out and still have all that we need?" results in a lively disagreement which is simply acknowledged and hosted.

• ***What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.*** **This is not a "share or die" event! During this retreat, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.**

• ***Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions**** **instead of counsel, corrections, etc. With such questions, we help "hear each other into deeper speech."**

*an open honest question is one that you have no idea what the answer could be. It is respecting that each person has their own inner wisdom and the questions are asked to help the person pay attention to and listen to that within themselves.

• ***Attend to your own inner teacher.*** We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.

• ***When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.*** If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought her to this belief?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

After the story is put away, I am invited to choose my work and respond to the story in whatever way I choose. There is a variety of simple but top quality response materials. I choose my work and find a place where undisturbed or monitored I am free to continue wondering with my hands. There is no interference, no hovering, no judgment. We are not asked to share our work. It is work we do for ourselves not for someone else. Silence is intertwined throughout while each person deeply engages in her or his own response.

• ***Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.*** Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a Circle of Trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the Circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.

After a generous amount of time, we are invited to put our work away and come back to the circle. We are invited to share our joys and concerns. We take turns listening and speaking. Each of us is invited individually to receive a blessing as we leave and again cross the threshold.

• ***Know that it's possible*** to leave the Circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

Does this work of Godly Play sound familiar? Like Courage Work, it is soul work. It is about being alone, together. It is about creating a safe place.

I have taken the Touchstones and used them to establish guidelines for *Godly Play* trainings with adults using the parts of a *Godly Play* session and the language of the Courage Touchstones. They are included in every training when we first gather and guide the three days we are together:

Getting Ready - We recognize that we need to prepare, to slow down, open our hearts and anticipate that of God in each other and in our coming together. We check ourselves to see if we are ready.

Crossing the Threshold - We choose to leave one space and enter another, bringing our whole selves to the circle and choosing to be present as fully as possible. We come with our doubts, fears and failings as well as our convictions, joys and successes, our listening as well as our speaking.

Building the Circle - We extend and receive welcome. We do best in hospitable places. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality. We take our place and make room for all to take their place.

Telling and Listening to stories - We need and use story to listen to our own story. We use an economy of words and an economy of gestures so that we provide uncluttered and open access to the story.

Wondering - We invite dialogue with open, honest questions. No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting each other. When there are differences and we feel judgmental or defensive we turn to wonder. "I wonder what brought them to this belief - I wonder how they are feeling now? I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" We strive to put aside judgment to listen to others and to ourselves more deeply.

Silence - We trust and learn from silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world and a way of knowing in itself. We treat silence as a member of the group. After someone speaks we take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. We only speak to improve on the silence.

Response - We practice attending and responding to our own inner teacher as we explore stories, questions and silence in the circle. We pay close attention to our own reactions and responses, to our most important teacher and give freedom to express that in a variety of ways. We trust our minds, our hearts, our emotions, our hands and our bodies. We play together.

Prayers and Feast - We take the time to express what is most deeply true and important (prayer). We recognize that feasting is who we are with (relationships) - not what or how much we get (product).

Blessing - We both give and receive blessing. We look for and call out the best in each other and affirm who each person most authentically is. We each are called to have the courage to be who we most authentically and uniquely are.

Goodbye - We have all the time we need. We believe that it is possible to leave the circle with whatever it is that we needed when we joined the circle and that what we receive will continue to grow in the days ahead.

Both *Godly Play* and Courage Work have tapped into a primal stream of ancient understanding that has flowed throughout the history of humankind. It is present in all wisdom traditions and in the ways we wrestle to make sense of ourselves and our world. It has to do with story, with play, with listening, with asking questions, with community, but primarily and fundamentally, with deep respect for the inner teacher in every person, however one chooses to name it: soul, true self, inner light, spark of the divine, that of God. Courage Work and *Godly Play* are both about creating a safe space to provide access to that stream of ancient knowledge. It is challenging and deeply rewarding work. The Touchstones are critical components to help create the space where this work can happen.

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The Practice of Loving Others

By Debbie Stanley

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Does anyone really understand what this type of love involves?

On June 15, 2014, at midnight, my life changed from being a beloved only adult-child to an orphaned adult. My mother died.

After eighteen months of actively listening, gently caring, releasing assumptions, prayerfully begging and pleading, death came. How could this be? The person who loved me more than life itself was gone from life as I knew it. At the moment of death, as I steadfastly looked at my mom, a question provided by a dear friend dropped into my psyche: Can you befriend sadness? Sadness was right beside me with all its characteristics: uncontrollable wailings, feelings of loss and despair, heartbrokenness, loneliness, and woe. Who would want to befriend such an entity that causes the light of the sun to dim and takes your breath away? But I am finding out that sadness has been with me throughout my life and especially during the precious time when I provided care for my dying mother.

Sadness is a gift like time, which the poet William Stafford penned "wants to show me a different country." While taking care of my mom I experienced how to listen deeply because each word/phrase from her lips was like a jewel. As my mom lost her ability to move, I carried her, probably as she had carried me so many years ago. As her illness advanced, my mom began to call me "mom." What a privilege to be given such an honorary title. As her eyes grew dim, I remembered her bedtime stories from days of long ago, and I then read those stories to her.

Throughout these dark days with hints of light, my mom continued to teach me how to love. Yes, love is demanding, but so worthy of emulation. This gift from my mom prepared me to provide care for my cousin who, now at age 54, has dementia and is in the process of dying. My mom's love lessons continue in a new form. So the daunting question lingers with me through the precious moments of writing this chapter. I am learning how to befriend sadness in myriad ways. It has become such a master teacher in my life. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to pen my process of befriending sadness as a way to authentically practice loving others.

Growing up as an only child, in retrospect, was so paradoxical. As an only child, I lived alone but not lonely in various forms of community, including church, school, extended family events. I loved having friends come over to play, but I never longed for a baby sister or big brother. In elementary school, my favorite place was the library, a place where I could read alone and in the company of strangers. One Christmas my dad bought me a bike with an attached basket on the handlebars. The basket was designed to carry up to ten books. Dad was so proud that I had earned the privilege of being able and responsible enough to check out **ten** books at the Brooklyn Public Library! My friends laughed with scorn and said my bike was a truck. You know what? I didn't care because my dad bought it and that's all that mattered!

Speaking of Christmas...my mom and dad had to leave a letter from Santa stating that he would not be returning until I had children of my own. I never really got over this and never taught my children about Santa because I felt betrayed. This was an important lesson for me. My take-away: never lie to those you love, tell the truth even if it hurts.

Though events in our family were not always ideal, my mom, dad, and I were the perfect family of three. I was the beloved daughter who knew I was loved and learned how to love and be loved. For many years, I thought my life was like the lives of other children. Whenever I returned home from any outing lasting from a few hours to a couple of months, I was greeted, welcomed, and received by two people who were genuinely happy to see me and I them. I believe the way my parents loved me created a "fearless" place in my psyche. The love that blanketed me throughout my childhood afforded me the space to not be fearful, although there were and are fearful places in the world around me. I do believe my parents practiced "loving" with me.

In my current work as a Courage & Renewal facilitator I have found the values of my upbringing are underscored by the core values of the Center for Courage & Renewal (CCR). Two of the values that resonate deeply within my soul are love and diversity. CCR defines these values as such:

- **Love:** Our work is grounded in love, by which we mean the capacity to extend ourselves for the sake of another person's growth. Our work in community stretches us to understand, respect, and support each other, teaching us why learning to love is one of the most demanding disciplines we can choose.

- **Diversity:** Diversity is a deeply valued source of strength, richness, and wisdom for us and for the communities in which we live and work. The capacity to welcome and make space for diverse voices and multiple perspectives is critical to the creation of Circles of Trust, and to the healing and wholeness needed in our world.

How does one not only value love but practice it fully? As CCR states in its core values, practicing love is a "demanding discipline." As a receiver of this love, I must say that my parents practiced it seamlessly and authentically. The lessons I learned, especially from my mom, are evident in my work as a minister, consultant, parent, relative, and friend.

My first realization of the impact my parent's love had on my professional and personal life roles and work was noted when I applied for the Kirkridge Fellowship for Courage & Renewal facilitators in September, 2014. I was invited to write a plan with goals toward some form of self-actualization in a specific area of deep interest. I found the invitation evocative, perplexing, and intriguing. As I pondered my goals for the fellowship, the questions I entertained were laced with my ongoing and baffling question around befriending sadness. The framing of the questions and goals included my experiences both professionally and personally.

My overall life has been enhanced and assaulted in the social arena as a university professor, classroom teacher, minister in a non-denominational Christian church, and single parent (while married) of three very busy, challenging, and bold children. How have I held sadness in these roles? I wholeheartedly know that I sustained myself through the power of love. In my Fellowship application I wrote:

> *As a Lead Facilitator of the Center's Facilitator Preparation Program, I usually create space for potential facilitators to uncover their understanding of "otherness." I am learning so much from others as I extend genuine invitations to journey inward to see what one knows or seeks to know. Being with others at Kirkridge will allow me to, once again, seek deeper understanding of how to connect with those who are so like and unlike me. I expect the experience will be transformative. My role of Pastor of Children's Church provides an opportunity to engage children in the various ways to "Love your neighbor*

> *as yourself." Does anyone really understand what this type of love involves? I think the concept of* ***ubuntu*** *offers a most illustrative and concrete way to express the meaning. The Fellows program provides the opportunity for me to engage with others looking for love in all the right places!*

During the time of the Kirkridge Fellowship, I was gifted by my colleagues, in honor of my mother, with a trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand. This bucket-list trip, *Finding Your Elephant Self*, was facilitated by renowned cellist Jami Sieber. The trip had many "leading up to" live love encounters. The first encounter was the love between my students and me. The words of revered educator Paolo Freire, *"Education (teaching) is an act of love, thus an act of courage,"* served as a truism and mantra for my classroom pedagogy. I wrote about this in the book, *Let the Beauty We Love Be What We Do,* and I stated my yearnings to practice love:

> *I wanted a classroom full of independent learners who were fully engaged in the teaching/learning community. I wanted to hear them deeply into speech. I wanted to be known as a teacher who cared, who shared, and who listened. This is the beauty that I love. My classroom was the place where I loved and was loved; listened and was heard; was seen and saw. My deepest teaching desire was to provide a classroom designed like an oasis; better yet, a refuge for the souls of children... A place where they could receive what they needed emotionally, intellectually, and socially.*

It takes courage to love others. My live encounters with people who shared neither my race nor culture have been, I feel, the best indicator of loving others. These encounters are undergirded by what Dr. Parker J. Palmer, CCR founder, defines in *Healing the Heart of Democracy* as "faithfulness":

> *We must judge ourselves by a higher standard than effectiveness, the standard called faithfulness. Are we faithful to the community on which we depend, to doing what we can in response to its pressing needs? Are we faithful to the better angels of our nature and to what they call forth from us? Are we faithful to the eternal conversation of the human race, to speaking and listening in a way that takes us closer to truth? Are we faithful to the call of courage that summons us to witness to the common good, even against great odds? When faithfulness is our standard, we are more likely to sustain our engagement with tasks that will never end: doing justice, loving mercy, and calling the beloved community into being* (192–193).

My trip to Thailand showcased my ability to faithfully practice love to unfamiliar humans and an elephant named Tantawan. I wane poetic when I think of my "once in a lifetime" trip. I used George Ella Lyon's poem *Where I'm From* as my writing prompt to articulate my musings while in Thailand:

Where I'm From or My Now and Then Story

I have been to Chiang Mai, Thailand in the Mae Ping River Basin. Located near water like my Myrtle Beach, SC where the Atlantic Ocean invites the inlander to enjoy "fun in the sun." I have been to Lampang, Thailand, with its undulating hills, dense forests, grasslands, brooks, streams and rivers. I am from Little River, SC, where the river supplies fresh clams, spots, and oysters to locals and visitors.

I have been to Sukhothia, Thailand, named by its rulers "the dawn of happiness." I am from Brooklyn, "City of Churches" the dawning place of my journey as a Christian minister. I am from the question "What is awakening in me?" I have seen Thailand's historic Buddhist temples built on the mountains, the Dharma and koans displayed on placards in the wildwoods, the covenant of grace realized.

I have been to Thailand where I met Peun, the mahout, and Tantawan, an elephant...a herd's matriarch-- fearless and present, intentional and tender, quick to laugh. Or speak silence. I turn to wonder as Peun sings to Tantawan. A song of freedom is what I hear. I am a learner.

I am from South Carolina, a state whose geography has the blood of my ancestors traced throughout, from a quiet river town where I am continuously challenged by bigotry, a longing for inclusion, hatred and love... my own andmy neighbors .I know why the caged bird sings.

From "Sawadeeka," "Kawp koon ka," and "Mai Pen Rai." A language as gentle as the people who speak it. This is my story. This is my song. I am from "What's love got to do with it?" and "Stop the Love You Save." I have been to the land of free and chained elephants. I am from that paradox where true mahouts live and dance in love with their families both human and elephant.

I am from John 3:16. From God's Love on display. I am from the place where Dr. Jenn cared for the animals (dogs and elephants) and humans. I grimaced as she placed acupuncture pins in Mahout John's head. I am from the Lampang Elephant sanctuary where the Boon Lot elephant had an infection in his rear humongous leg and the mahout assistant washed and bathed it daily. I am from love manifested in Thailand.

I'm from the tragic gap where I hold intellectualized confusion and intriguing insight, where I'm less concerned with bitterness and pain, and more interested in compassion.
From Brooklyn's suburbs of my Jewish Godfather, Farragut Housing for the low to no income (race not a factor).

From Little River and Myrtle Beach where some children have never seen the beach. I'm from the Thai Elephant Conservation Center where the children played with the elephants and fished where the elephant bathed. I am from the mahout community where the pond's substance served as a communal meal.
I learned the way of a mahout and an elephant.
I am from what I have witnessed in Thailand. Boundless love.

I'm from a walk in Prospect Park to visit the elephants with my dad who died in 1983. From a recently deceased mother who loved flowers (we visited Brooklyn's Botanical Gardens a lot). I am from the place where she planted them meticulously and strategically on her land in Little River, SC. I am from my granddad, who "accidently" drowned after he purchased this land for his family in 1949 through sharecropping.

I am from that land. I am from the legacy of my parents and ascribe to them my love of nature's beauty and my unyielding stubbornness to honor it.
I uncovered this knowing in Thailand. I am from a new place. A place of renewed hope for the diversity I long to know.
Hope found on the back of an elephant named Tantawan. I am from the Thailand mountains where Tantawan and I walked along the dusty path with her mahout, Peun. The faint smell of Poo Pond and the pond where mom planted her azaleas are presenting hope across waters.
If I had not met this particular elephant among the trees in the mountains of Thailand, there would be no heartbreak at all.
I am still learning.

When I met Tantawan, not only was I mesmerized by her bigness but captured by her graceful welcome. I wept. Tantawan "stooped" down so I could climb up onto her massive neck. She stood and we began a journey into the experience of my uncovering and discovering my elephant self.

There are many lessons I reclaimed from "Tantee" (our secret code name). I reclaimed my right to live fearlessly, even in unfamiliarity. Tantawan was so different from me. No language. No kindred species. No cultural affiliations. We had one similarity; we live on the same planet. This is where we began.

I placed all of my assumptions aside and began practicing love...for an elephant. It was just that simple. I fed Tantee naturally, she fed me soulfully. I would sing to her, and she would bob her enormous head as if she were singing too. When I was on her neck, I would brush the trash of the forest out of her bristled strands of hair. Her maternal presence soothed the sorrowing segments in my soul. She would give me elephant kisses with her massive trunk.

I wondered if everyone were experiencing this elephant joy? No...this was my experience and it was real. I wept many times because I remembered the days with my mom, her loving silence, her singing Porgy and Bess' *Summertime*, her gigantic presence in my life. In some unexplainable way, Tantee and I were practicing some form of love for each other. Believe me, I am not romanticizing this experience: a live encounter with an elephant deepened my understanding of diversity. As our guide Jami explained, "If this great communication and this great connection can be made between different species, how can it not be made between humans? How can we not continue to work to make that connection?" (You can see and hear her: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duSgIcEqUzQ*)

Now, as I continue in my work as a facilitator of Circles of Trust, I look for Tantee in human form. I seek ways to enter the conversation and sustain the yearning to know and be known by others. One way that my interaction with Tantawan is being honored is in my sessions on diversity in the CCR Facilitator Preparation Program. I call my session Beloved Community -- and I offer this premise with great gratitude to Tantawan as I continue to make connections to others:

> *I desire to live a life free from the labels of others. I don't want to be known as a part of a "marginalized" group as defined by our society. I long for the freedom to be my truest self and remain committed to stand up for this freedom, for myself and others. My angst, my longing, is holding the question of how one can create an equitable, inclusive, and fair people-space when the creation of that space can mean very different things to different people? Therefore, I am continuously and intentionally seeking to know how to create spaces where courageous honesty, open-minded acceptance, authenticity and consistent integrity are valued and honored. I can belong in a diverse group of people who seek social justice and equitable policies if the group genuinely enjoys diversity and doesn't need me to conform to their standards, nor them to mine. Where is my Beloved Community? We are the ones we've been waiting for...*

Sometimes making connections is extremely challenging. It is during tumultuous times, such as the recent Presidential election campaign of 2016. I am a minister in a multi-ethnic congregation in rural South Carolina. The majority of the people I minister

to and with are staunch Republicans; I am not. In our Circles of Trust we have "rules of engagement" called touchstones or Boundary Markers. One of the touchstones that support my quest to practice love with others is *Turn to Wonder:*

> ***When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.*** Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, "I wonder why they feel/think this way?" or "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

Before I was introduced to this touchstone, my mom's rule of life was "If you can't say something nice, choose silence until you can." My mom's rule helped me as a minister to turn to wonder. I was in what my friend Parker calls a "tragic gap" between my Christian principles and practices. There were times when my church brothers and sisters would utter opinions that would literally remove the air from the room. I allowed myself to feel invisible and voiceless, once again. I alluded to this state of being in *Let the Beauty We Love Be What We Do* when I wrote about my experience as a graduate student in education:

> *Although my classes were relevant and teacher-education courses were content specific, I remember, very vividly, feeling invisible and voiceless in my college classroom. The invisibility which I experienced in third grade was more pronounced and made more explicit through the actions of my professors. I was a lost soul in the academy of higher learning. I had neither advocate nor empathetic ear to help me process these churning feelings of inadequacy. One professor told me, "You are a diamond in the rough." To me that meant, for right now, you are useless.*

This time, unlike my years in graduate school, I didn't have my mom to help me process these feelings of inadequacy. I was saddened by the church family and their seeming unwillingness to be kind as we disagreed and experienced differing political persuasions. The opportunity to befriend sadness was making itself known… again.

I chose to use words of others to strengthen my decision to love like Langston Hughes quipped "*in the dark where there ain't been no light.*"

I chose to respond like Dr. King when he declared, "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*"

I chose to cling to the words of Jesus when he urged us to "*Love thy neighbor.*"

I also remembered my grandma, especially as her death was approaching and she would sing, "*Better days are coming by and by*" and "*You keep on living, you'll learn.*" These words and a few others are what sustained me in my quest to practice loving

others when love wasn't readily available from the others.

It's one thing to speak lovely words but living within those lovely words is "demanding." Yes, Dr. King, I too "*have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.*" Sadness, once again, had me in its embrace, teaching me how to lean into love rather than resist it.

An important lesson that I had to remind myself not to ever lose sight of is about the power of forgiveness when practicing love is demanding. It helped to read Sharon Salzberg, meditation teacher, author and cofounder of Insight Meditation Society, especially her column for Krista Tippett's *On Being*: *"Forgiveness is a way of loosening the grip of fixation, but I've seen over and over again that it is a process. It is not a decision, and it does not come about by force of will."*

As I sought clarity in my role as a minister, I knew I had a choice to make: leave the church or stay. Forgiveness isn't easy, **and** it is complicated. By choosing to forgive those who seemed to me to have violated many of the teachings of Christ in their choice of Presidential candidate, I had to release myself from feelings of rightness. I remember the words of Rumi, an ancient mystic poet translated by Coleman Barks:

> ***Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,***
> ***there is a field. I'll meet you there.***
> ***When the soul lies down in that grass,***
> ***the world is too full to talk about.***
> ***Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense.***

I believe the field in which Rumi invites us to meet is Parker's tragic gap. Parker asserts, *"By the tragic gap I mean the gap between the hard realities around us and what we know is possible — not because we wish it were so, but because we've seen it with our own eyes."*

I had the opportunity during this election year to hold the paradoxical nature of practicing love. Love is paradoxical because it negotiates. "*Love and negotiation are inextricably connected*," writes mediator Robert Benjamin. *"Both love and negotiation require in equal parts a passionate commitment and dispassionate calculation"* (http://www.mediate.com/articles/benjlove.cfm).

I understand Benjamin to mean that, in any relationship, an intentional calculation must be made for how I will extend myself for the sake of another person's growth. This personal belief was actualized when I chose to stand faithfully in the pulpit of my church and speak lovingly to my church family, saying I could not partake in the behavior I had observed during election year 2016. I told them I could not agree to antagonize others because their political persuasion was different from mine.

I think I had a John Woolman moment, as I drew on a favorite story of the minister who advocated against slavery in the midst of his slave-holding Quaker Friends. Woolman never directly attacked slave-holders, but instead, he stressed equality and urged against the buying and keeping of slaves. John Woolman's faithfulness in the practice of love was observed through his refusal to purchase goods produced by slave labor. Four years after Woolman's death, slave ownership among Friends was finally prohibited. To my point, I didn't leave the church; I stayed because I found value in my relationship with the people to whom I ministered and loved, but on this one grave point, I happened not to agree.

I also more fully understood my friend Parker's beautiful writing about a broken heart: *If I keep my heart supple by "exercising" it — allowing my suffering and the suffering around me to stretch that spiritual muscle — heartbreak will open my heart, bringing me more peace and adding to the world's vital store of compassion.* This 2016 election year helped me, as a minister, practice love by allowing my heart to be broken and reveal my hidden wholeness.

Yes, love negotiates. The gift of sadness showed me a different country. I continue to seek the courage to live in a divided world, as the gifts of sadness that repeatedly break my heart are my great teachers and guides.

Dr. Debbie Stanley, a longtime public educator, is now Children's Pastor and Church Evangelist and Courage and Renewal facilitator. When Debbie is not in a Circle of Trust, she is present in the journey with her very dear "sister" Demetra who has dementia. Debbie learned, from her amazing mom, to take time for self-care so she walks a mile a day with her dog, Cabeau. Debbie can be reached by email joyfulone120@gmail.com

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

By James R. Sims

If there has been a consistent theme in the struggles of my life, it has been in recognizing, calling attention to, and serving the ones at the margins, the ones I feel many of us would just as soon remain invisible. I have a strong awareness of who is not at the table and why and how are they being excluded.

The greatest suffering in my life has come from my failure to raise awareness, both my own and others, to the presence and conditions of those who are marginalized. And when the consciousness of individuals and communities **has** been raised and we can open our arms wider, or move over just a little bit and set another place at the table, it has been the source of my greatest joy.

Since my first experiences as a participant in a Circle of Trust, I have been drawn to being a facilitator of Courage work. I have the sense that I would gain skills that would improve my effectiveness and deepen that joy that flows from helping individuals and communities become more accepting, inclusive, and open. But something has been tugging at me, even from the beginning of facilitator preparation. As its pull increased, I realize that I cannot and must not ignore it.

Because I am a visual learner, I will describe the scene that I see with the eyes of my heart. I find myself seated at a gracious banquet – a Circle of Trust filled with an

amazing array of healthy and delicious choices. As I look about at the others who have a place at this table, I recognize that we have achieved considerable socioeconomic and educational advantages, occupational and influential positions that imply that we are "qualified" to be here. And, indeed, we are.

But there is more to this scene. Next to our table is a window with a view of the world beyond. Through this window I can see hungry, frightened children with their faces pressed against the glass; adults, young and old, faces lined with worry and regret. Our eyes meet, and I yearn to create a place at the table for each and all of them.

I think part of what drew me to Courage Work initially, and inspired me to become a facilitator, has been the certainty that I would gain tools and skills needed to create safe spaces where all are welcome and where everyone is included. That also motivated me to apply for the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship. So, let me tell you the story I shared as part of my application for that program:

It is the summer of 1961. My family and I have been in Louisville for two years. My teachers have been noticing that I am a bright, inquisitive, and enthusiastic student. My parents have been encouraged to have me evaluated for placement in the Advanced Track, an experimental accelerated learning model that is new to Kentucky. The model is not new to my family; my older brother John has been benefiting from it and has skipped a grade. I am aware that this is an exceptional opportunity for which I have qualified, and I am eager to see what it has to offer.

I soon discover that the eagerness and excitement I am feeling is thoroughly justified, and I soak up all the stimulating and complex subject matter that is being handed to me. I am not alone in my enthusiasm. My classmates are also ready for the stimulation that the program offers, and we thrive individually and synergistically. My teacher, Mrs. Stratton, is wonderful.

Because my father is a musician, I have been given exceptional encouragement, training, and opportunities in music. My extra-curricular activities reflect this during my third-grade year. I am one of the three child spirits in Mozart's Magic Flute, *offered by the Kentucky Opera Association.*

Mrs. Stratton comes to see one of the performances and afterwards makes her way backstage to see me. She finds me, administers a huge hug, and bursts into tears while telling me how proud she is of me. I am stunned. Having touched my teacher's heart so deeply intensifies my appreciation of my educational experience and my desire to excel in my schoolwork.

My success in music at such an early age was to have a profound influence on the direction of my life. But my love of and yearning for artistic expression were about to expand. I developed a deep commitment to understand the influence of the arts when

fully integrated into the educational process. Through this commitment, I discovered my love of the visual arts. I experienced my first instruction and encouragement in those skills, and I was enchanted. Through the generous allotment of time dedicated to art, and the wide variety of media available, I began to broaden my abilities and interests. The enchantment of this connection would influence my life and livelihood in the same ways that my musicianship would.

But I could not recognize or control the seductive power of it and the ways it would draw my attention from less interesting but critically important tasks.

For the most part, my grades were good throughout the year. There were inconsistencies – a characteristic that would follow me throughout my schooling and into adulthood – but I would always bounce back. As I moved through elementary school into middle school and on to high school and college, the inconsistencies became more and more extreme. Excel, fail, excel, fail. (It was not until my mid-forties that I would be clinically diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder which – in retrospect - explained a lot of things.)

I am coming to the end of the year and it is time for standardized testing. Number 2 Pencils. Filling in the circles. Mrs. Stratton has suggested that we bring a book to class in order to have something to do if we finish before the time is up for each section. I have checked out a book on drawing cartoon faces – a skill that I have an intense interest to develop.

Perhaps you can see where this is going. And if you have ever been either an educator or a student, you might have a strong sense that this is not going to turn out well. You will be correct.

I am in the third grade, and it makes sense to me that if I simply go through and mark the circles in a random pattern that I will probably get a bunch of them right. And then I could read my book and draw. This is what I proceed to do.

When the test results are passed out to the class, I do not receive anything. I am confused. I am thinking, "Surely it can't have been that bad..." My growing sense of impending doom is confirmed when the Jefferson County school system superintendent, Dr. Richard VanHoose, shows up at our classroom door, and I am summoned into THE HALL (a place of shame and degradation where one is sent to be ostracized and humiliated) for questioning. His dark gray suit, nondescript tie and obvious frustration stay in my mind. He is perplexed when he asks me, "Jim, what happened?!"

At this point I must say that I have never been one to show great personal courage in the face of such authority. Truth-telling has been a lifelong struggle for me in the best of situations. I take no consolation in the fact that it is for others as well.

When Dr. VanHoose asks, I am unable to explain my reasoning – which by this time I have determined is completely absurd – and so I hang my head and do not say a word.

I was back in my former school the next year. The decision to remove me from the Advanced Track was made without any further discussion with me. The assumption the school authorities shared with my parents was, "We believe Jim was sending us a message: that the work was too hard - that the stimulation or the stress of complex studies was more than he could bear."

While I am aware of what I have accomplished in spite of this unfortunate episode in my young life, I will never know what might have been achieved if I could have summoned the courage to blurt out to Dr. VanHoose, "I really just wanted to draw! And I thought that guessing a pattern of dots on the page might just work. I know it sounds silly, and I cannot believe that I thought it might work! May I please have another chance?"

It was not until I was in college that I ever told anyone what I had done.

I take responsibility for my silence. Even at that tender age, I knew that I should have owned my foolishness and called for a "do-over." In letting go the opportunity to own my fallibility, I took on a burden of guilt and shame. As an adult, I realize, with great sadness, just how onerous this burden has been. Suffering beneath this load was at least as damaging, and possibly worse than the lost opportunities that the advanced education might have provided. Moreover, experiences of this weight that transpired at early age set a pattern of response that has been self-replicating.

As an adult, I also realize that the system failed me. I was nine years old. Some attempt on the part of those educators – from the teacher in the classroom to the superintendent of the school system – to work with a nine-year-old heart until they could discern what had transpired would not have taken a huge effort on ***their*** part.

I have worked with children and adolescents, as well as many adults, who are struggling to recognize their limitations, identify foolish choices, and engage their highest selves as the path to achieving their potential. (Incidentally, I am on the same quest.) I have proven to myself many times that this can only be accomplished by engaging the other, regardless of age or station, with the kind of respect that honors the dignity and uniqueness of their journey. This kind of respect grounds fears, guilt, anger and shame. This kind of respect honors the power of creativity and encourages self discipline. This kind of respect encourages the other to recognize and follow his or her own source of deep wisdom.

For me, the ability to access and demonstrate this kind of respect for others does not come easily. For me, it requires that I set aside my pride, my solutions for their problems, and that I avoid anything that puts me between them and their discovery

of and trust in their own deep knowing. The other person is every bit as worthy of this kind of respect as I am. The commitment to this kind of respect requires intense practice and patience with one's self.

This led me to Courage work.

One of my sister Courage facilitators, Sally Z. Hare, says of herself that after more than twenty years of extensive experience of Circles of Trust, she is ***still*** "becoming a facilitator." So if she embraces this process, then I will also state gladly that I, too, am still **becoming** a facilitator. In claiming that, I have a great sense of relief from that part of me that says I should know everything by now. I am further relieved by owning the fact that I seem to know so little. But I am not discouraged, nor do I despair, for I am relieved of the huge task of maintaining the facade of knowing everything.

My honesty allows me to set aside my ego and glimpse my true self. So, having written my third-grade story for the first time in my life, and particularly in the context of this Fellowship that has provided such intense, safe experiences with an array of seasoned facilitators, my eyes begin to leak. I am startled by the realization that there is a person in this story who is on the outside looking in, who qualifies for the title of "Least of These." His name is Jimmy.

And in an instant, three streams of insight emerge:

- First, in identifying the points in my life in which I find myself on the outside of the "Safe Place" or the "Circle of Trust" (insert any of those thin places where the shy soul appears), I am finally able to re-examine and re-frame those events in ways that allow me to lay down those burdens of guilt or shame or anger.

- The second stream I name *Creating A Circle of Trust around Any Conversation.* I long to open the circle wide enough to include every person with whom I will ever have a conversation. Conversations with people unfamiliar with Circle of Trust principles and practices or our Touchstones or Boundary Markers happen so fast. Even in conversations with experienced facilitators when we are not "encircled" or have not "set the stage" or reminded ourselves of our commitments, I find - more often than not - that I am unable to access those principles and ground myself in those practices. And I slip and slide inexorably into my default position of "I know what everybody needs to solve their problems at any given moment, or if not, gimme a couple o' seconds and I'll figure it out."

  (I hope you're laughing at this. I also hope you recognize the universality of this tendency, and perhaps have seen yourself in this position upon occasion ...)

But this second insight comes from the recognition of my complicity in these kinds of moments, and knowing that I have the capability to hold a safe space, that I will be able to be present to the insights of others, bearing witness to the appearances of other shy souls.

- The third insight gradually comes into focus out of the deep respect that I have learned to offer in Circles of Trust. My heart imagines a transformation of Jimmy's/my experience:

> *We, Mr. Sims and Jimmy, are not out in the "Hall of Shame and Alienation," but have walked out the door at the end of the hall and are somewhere on the playground – perhaps under a tree – with a cool drink. After we have been seated for a few minutes, I suggest, "I wonder if we could play a sort of game. I would tell you some of the things that I really like and then you could tell me about some of your favorite things. Would you try that with me?"*

Maybe creating a place at the table for my Self, young and old, is a step in the right direction. Now that I have extended an invitation to Jimmy **and** Mr. Sims, perhaps my arms are open wider and I can move over a bit and set another place.

James R. Sims (Jim) has been a musician all his life. He is also a potter and loves to create with his hands. A Courage & Renewal Facilitator for almost seven years, Jim is married to Caroline Fairless, who is also a CCR Facilitator AND a courageous writer of great skill and depth. They live with three rescued dogs (Callie, Carson the BubbaDog, and Althea) in Wilmot, New Hampshire. You can reach Jim through email: jarosims@gmail.com

A STEPPING STONE

Principles of the Circle of Trust Approach

If we are willing to embrace the challenge of becoming whole, we cannot embrace it alone—at least, not for long: we need trustworthy relationships to sustain us, tenacious communities of support, to sustain the journey toward an undivided life. Taking an inner journey toward rejoining soul and role requires a rare but real form of community that I call a "circle of trust."

—Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness (adapted)

- **Everyone has an inner teacher**: Every person has access to an inner source of truth, named in various wisdom traditions as identity, true self, heart, spirit or soul. The inner teacher is a source of guidance and strength that helps us find our way through life's complexities and challenges. Circles of Trust give people a chance to listen to this source, learn from it and discover its imperatives for their work and their lives.

- **Inner work requires solitude and community**: In Circles of Trust we make space for the solitude that allows us to learn from within, while supporting that solitude with the resources of community. Participants take an inner journey in community where we learn how to evoke and challenge each other without being judgmental, directive, or invasive.

- **Inner work must be invitational**: Circles of Trust are never "share or die" events, but times and places where people have the freedom within a purposeful process to learn and grow in their own way, on their own schedule, and at their own level of need. From start to finish, this approach invites participation rather than insisting upon it because the inner teacher speaks by choice, not on command.

- **Our lives move in cycles like the seasons**: By using metaphors drawn from the seasons to frame our exploration of the inner life, we create a hospitable space that allows people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to engage in a respectful dialogue. These metaphors represent cycles of life—such as the alternation of darkness and light, death and new life—shared by everyone in a secular, pluralistic society, regardless of philosophical, religious, or spiritual differences.

- **An appreciation of paradox enriches our lives and helps us hold greater complexity**: The journey we take in a Circle of Trust teaches us to approach the many polarities that come with being human as "both–ands" rather than "either–ors," holding them in ways that open us to new insights and possibilities. We listen to the inner teacher and to the voices in the circle, letting our own insights and the wisdom that can emerge in conversation check and balance each other. We trust both our intellects and the knowledge that comes through our bodies, intuitions, and emotions.

- **We live with greater integrity when we see ourselves whole**: Integrity means integrating all that we are into our sense of self, embracing our shadows and limitations as well as our light and our gifts. As we deepen the congruence between our inner and outer lives, we show up more fully in the key relationships and events of our lives, increasing our capacity to be authentic and courageous in life and work.

- **A "hidden wholeness" underlies our lives**: Whatever brokenness we experience in ourselves and in the world, a "hidden wholeness" can be found just beneath the surface. The capacity to stand and act with integrity in the gap between what is and what could be or should be—resisting both the corrosive cynicism that comes from seeing only what is broken and the irrelevant idealism that comes from seeing only what is not—has been key to every life-giving movement and is among the fruits of the Circle of Trust approach.

Practices of the Circle of Trust Approach

In this culture, we know how to create spaces that invite the intellect to show up, to argue its case, to make its point. We know how to create spaces that invite the emotions to show up, to express anger or joy. We know how to create spaces that invite the will to show up, to consolidate effort and energy around a common task. And we surely know how to create spaces that invite the ego to show up, preening itself and claiming its turf! But we seem to know very little about creating spaces that invite the soul to show up, this core of ourselves, our selfhood.

—Parker J. Palmer, ***A Hidden Wholeness***

- **Creating spaces that are open and hospitable, but resource-rich and charged with expectancy**: In a Circle of Trust, we are invited to slow down, listen, and reflect in a quiet and focused space. At the same time, we engage in dialogue with others in the circle—a dialogue about things that matter. As this "sorting and sifting" goes on, and we are able to clarify and affirm our truth in the presence of others, that truth is more likely to overflow into our work and lives.

- **Committing to no fixing, advising, "saving," or correcting one another**: Everything we do is guided by this simple rule, one that honors the primacy and integrity of the inner teacher. When we are free from external judgment, we are more likely to have an honest conversation with ourselves and learn to check and correct ourselves from within.

- **Asking honest, open questions to "hear each other into speech"**: Instead of advising each other, we learn to listen deeply and ask questions that help others hear their own inner wisdom more clearly. As we learn to ask questions that are not advice in disguise, that have no other purpose than to help someone listen to the inner teacher, all of us learn and grow.

- **Exploring the intersection of the universal stories of human experience with the personal stories of our lives**: Guided conversations focused on a poem, a teaching story, a piece of music or a work of art—drawn from diverse cultures and wisdom traditions—invite us to reflect on the "big questions" of our lives, allowing each person to intersect and explore them in his or her own way.

- **Using multiple modes of reflection so everyone can find his or her place and pace**: In Circles of Trust, we speak and we listen. We explore important questions in large group conversation and dialogues in small groups. We make time for individual reflection and journaling. We respect nonverbal ways of learning, including music, movement and the arts. We honor the educative power of silence and the healing power of laughter. Together we weave a "tapestry of truth" with many and diverse threads, creating a pattern in which everyone can find a place that both affirms and stretches them.

- **Honoring confidentiality**: Participants in Circles of Trust understand that nothing said in these circles will be revealed outside the circle and that things said by participants will not be pursued when a session ends, unless the speaker requests it.

For more about the principles and practices of the Circle of Trust approach in theory and in practice, please see the Center for Courage & Renewal (www.couragerenewal.org) and Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

Moving at the Speed of Guidance

By Megan LeBoutillier

Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull
of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.

----Rumi

My fourth grade teacher, whose name was Fred Weirdsma, looked like Alfred E. Newman from the cover of MAD magazine. One day he gave the entire class the assignment to take a pad of paper and a pencil to the library, look something up, and write a paper about it. It was such a departure from the customary blackboard lecture, note-taking model of day-to-day classroom education that the entire class sat stunned for a few moments. I remember immediately scanning my imagination, trying to find that place where liveliness was trying to catch its breath.

I was a curious kid. I liked learning. I loved school, especially the library. Anything you could think of, you could find in the library. So this invitation from Mr. Weirdsma arrived in my mind as an unanticipated dream come true. As I passed through the

doors of the library with my fresh pad of lined paper and finely sharpened pencil, I could feel the excitement surge into my body. The library was filled with interesting books, stories, facts and discoveries to be made. I was delighted with the invitation to explore and delirious to be released from my passive seat in the classroom. In this moment the world of independent learning and learner-directed education opened for me, and I was ruined for classroom education forever thereafter.

The year was 1964. Maybe I had seen Angie Dickinson on *Perry Mason, Mike Hammer*, or *The Fugitive*. I was a big fan of those television programs. I cannot remember what brought her to mind or if she was even what led me to look up the fact that Lloyds of London Insurance Agency insured her legs for one million dollars, but that detail was sufficiently interesting to me that I wrote my assignment about it. My curiosity was permanently piqued from that moment onward. Teachers willing to invite exploration outside the classroom remained harder to find.

During my sophomore year in high school I did battle with my English teacher, Mrs. Katz. I was in school outside of Washington, DC, and there were race riots taking place in the district. I'm not sure how I even knew about them because surely we were not being taught about racial tension -- quite the contrary. I had a strong urge to educate myself, and toward that end I created a curriculum and bibliography which I presented to Mrs. Katz as an alternative learning plan, adding that there would be plenty of time in my life to catch up with Victorian literature. Looking back on my proposal, Mrs. Katz herself, and the sort of school I was attending, I am surprised I didn't wind up in the Headmistress' office, or flat-out expelled. Needless to say, Mrs. Katz did not agree to my proposal, and I conducted my Black History course independently.

The experience convinced me that I needed to seek out alternative forms of education for myself. Once again the library held the answer. I found a college preparatory handbook that listed "alternative education." I sent off for catalogs. By the following year, with much determination and equal parts of guile, I had enrolled myself in Colorado at a co-ed college preparatory high school that afforded a much wider and, for me, more relevant scope of education. In addition to all of the academic classes, there were arts and crafts, outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking and gardening; and whole-school camping trips. I was in heaven, but I still struggled to get out of the classroom. Luckily for me when I proposed alternative or accelerated learning plans to my teachers at this new school, they were receptive and allowed me to move at my own pace through their curriculum. An unexpected outcome resulted in my going to college after my junior year and earning my high school diploma after completing a full year of college English.

Despite what I had been told about the rigors of college, my experience was that of being sent back to third grade. I remember only one professor who allowed me to write a paper on pseudo-hermaphrodism for extra credit in a class on human sexuality.

Otherwise the battle was on once again and my starts and stops in college finally ended when I found a completely learner-directed college program in Vermont and proceeded to graduate at age 30.

My intention after graduation was to never enter the halls of academia again, but when I heard of a graduate degree program that was entirely learner-directed, it spoke loudly to my heart. I applied and was accepted. I did not have any problem convincing them that I was the ultimate poster child for independent learning. Writing a learning plan, selecting my own doctoral committee members, and then conducting and documenting my new learning was a more sophisticated invitation to go to the library, look something up and write a paper about it. Thank you, Mr. Weirdsma, for planting this abundant seed of possibility.

> ***We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be.***
>
> *---Jane Austen*

So, what is the point of writing about all of this? I have been thinking lately about guidance and invitation and the importance of paying attention. In Circles of Trust® I am frequently invited to notice, name, and nurture. It is through this quiet practice that I often receive guidance and perhaps even the notion of making some changes in my life. What I have come to notice while writing this chapter is that I have long had a resourceful, resilient inner guide who looks after my survival, happiness, and well-being. Most of what I have learned, and the various paths I have taken in this life, have not followed a very clear-cut plan.

When people ask me what prompted a decision to move or to undertake such and such, I never seem to have a logical answer. I used to think this was a liability and that I was some sort of loose screw that couldn't find a place to become attached, but I have come to recognize that I have always been informed from the inside and have never found it easy to express this reality to those who are not. I used to be ashamed of my intuition, but I have come to see it as my closest ally. The inner prompts that guided my studies and insisted on more appropriate educational outlets literally saved my life and led me to find my true self, an inner peace, and perhaps even put me in closer touch with my soul. Lately I have been calling it guidance, though even the dictionary seems to think that guidance comes from the outside, and has something to do with missiles.

I believe that to squelch curiosity or impede learning in any way is to violate the integrity of an individual. I learn every day about the power and mystery of invitation. I am not sure it is true for everyone, but in my case being invited into learning was a great and lasting gift.

Therefore, when I was first introduced to the *Courage to Teach* with its premise that we all have an Inner Teacher, I was intrigued. I felt the same enthusiastic rush of possibility I felt walking toward the library with pad and pencil in fourth grade. The respectful recognition of an Inner Teacher, combined with the gentle practice of invitation, has taken me for a long journey with Courage & Renewal work.

> ***Inner guidance is heard like soft music in the night by those who have learned to listen.***
>
> *---Vernon Howard*

In 1995 I was invited by Sally Z. Hare to attend a weekend retreat with Parker Palmer. Sally is masterful at invitation, so I accepted, even though I didn't think that Parker Palmer or his work with public school educators had anything to do with me and I was reluctant to spend three days in a hotel conference room. Sally's gentle invitation and assurance that I would not be disappointed, combined with my boyfriend's parents visiting from out of town, convinced me.

I didn't know it at the time, but my life would be changed forever by Sally's invitation and my brief introduction to Parker Palmer. The following year I became the scribe for Sally's two-year seasonal *Courage to Teach* which, along with three other national pilot groups, launched the Courage Work that has now evolved into Circles of Trust and other forms of Courage & Renewal work. In my role as note-taker, trying to accurately catch the words being spoken, I was listening in a very different way than one listens when in conversation. When I got home and began transcribing my notes after the four-day weekend retreats, the impact of the words began making their impression on my mind and in my heart. I often found myself weeping in front of my computer screen because I was so moved by the honesty, vulnerability, and whole-heartedness of what was being shared within the circle. I didn't even have words to describe what I experienced within the group when I was not busily taking notes. I just knew that my affection for all of those people was exploding and I felt immensely alive in their presence. I have come to call those rapturous sensations "community."

When the two-year retreat series ended, I applied for the first facilitator preparation cohort because I had glimpsed the cultivation of an inner life, and I wanted more. More importantly I felt my inner yearning aligning with something larger than myself for perhaps the first time in my life. I could not have articulated it then, and I am having some difficulty now, but my actual self and my desired self were becoming aware and curious of one another. This may be when I began to consider naming what I was noticing as *guidance* because I was watching myself ask for and do things that were genuinely surprising me.

By 1999 I was "prepared" as a facilitator with about a dozen others, and the presumption was that all of us would start facilitating two-year retreat series for public

school educators. Funding from the Fetzer Institute had supported the pilot groups, but now the new facilitators were faced with the daunting task of raising their own funds. Fetzer had generously fully funded these early retreats for teachers, and to follow this model would require raising approximately $100,000 per two-year series. I felt desperately unprepared for such an undertaking and frustrated by my lack of confidence. In short, I got stuck and couldn't seem to find a way to move forward.

> ***...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now because you would not be able to live them. And, the point is to live everything. Live the questions now.***
>
> ***Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answers.***
>
> ---Rainer Maria Rilke from *Letters to A Young Poet,* translated by Stephen Mitchell

From my beginnings with this work we call Courage Work I have been attracted to these words the poet Rilke wrote as advice to a young poet – and the invitation to me to "live the questions." This, to me, is much like moving at the speed of guidance. Living the questions involves not being in too much of a rush to get to the answer, but rather to sit patiently until one arrives.

In retrospect I now see that I sat with the question for many years about how to fund this work. I also sat with the questions of where and how Courage Work truly intersected with who I am as a person and who I am as a facilitator. After quite a few years the answers are quietly beginning to show up.

For the past two years I have been one of twenty-seven Kirkridge Courage Fellows. As Fellows we were invited to step more deeply and genuinely into our facilitator selves. Unlike a typical assignment, such an invitation provokes uncertainty, confusion and honest self-reflection. I now realize that Mr. Weirdsma didn't give us an assignment that day; he issued an invitation to allow our individuality and our curiosity to inform our learning. So, with lined tablet and sharp pencil I sat with the question of what I might have to offer our community as a facilitator who was stepping more fully into her facilitator self.

The initial guidance came from my own questions about fundraising and my frustration with how facilitators were, or were not, equipped in this crucial area. I pushed back

against guidance. I did not want to read and write about money, but guidance persisted, as guidance often will, and I began reading and exploring the topic. It seemed I was being moved to become part of a solution rather than continue to bemoan a problem. I share some of the learning that has come for me from what I have come to call "***Navigating the Mobius Strip of Money***":

> ***Money is something we invented. We invented it to facilitate the transfer of goods and services when bartering became difficult to manage. But since we invented money we have imbued it with all sorts of powers and meaning that were never intended. Money has no inherent meaning in and of itself. The meaning we imagine money to have has actually been assigned to it by us. What if we were able to step back a bit and take an honest look at our culture? What if we were able to rethink our relationship with money and get back in touch with who we truly are and what really matters? What if we could take off the Lie of Scarcity that blurs our vision?***

I was talking about the metaphor of scarcity being a pair of glasses that distort our vision with a friend recently and he said, "I have several pairs of glasses that I have been trying to claw off my face for a while." He was not happy that despite his efforts, the glasses continue to blur his intended better vision in the areas of sexism, racism, and white male privilege. Before he went too much further with belittling himself for being a mortal human being, I asked him whether his glasses prescription had changed any over the years. He looked somewhat relieved and answered yes; as his eyes have gotten stronger, his eyeglass prescription has been able to become weaker. We agreed that this might be the best we can hope for.

Much of what we tell ourselves about money is a lie, or a justification for wrongdoing. We give money more meaning than life, the natural world, and even ourselves. Many people will do almost anything to garner more money. We pollute for money. We kill for money, and we disregard our souls when it comes to money. We live in a culture that encourages us to do this. Unless we admit this and shift our consciousness regarding money, we will forever operate without conscious awareness of our values, our assumptions and our worldviews when it comes to financial matters.

Lynne Twist, in *The Soul of Money*, presents the Three Toxic Myths of Scarcity:

- **There is Not Enough**
- **More is Better**
- **That's Just The Way It Is**

The first two myths probably come as no surprise. One doesn't need to look very far to convince oneself that those two myths fuel our economy, our overindulgences, our

fear of missing out, our competitiveness, and our fears that, in fact, we are not enough. The third myth is possibly the most toxic because it keeps us from questioning the first two. When we "buy into" the third myth we become effectively powerless. We become mindless consumers and forget what it means to be a citizen.

Without some conscious awareness of that part of ourselves that is involved, one way or another, with money, we run the risk of bringing only a diminished aspect of ourselves to bear in any circumstance. It isn't so much a question of how to get money or how to distribute it, but rather the question is more about our attitude about money.

Money can be a great divider. In order to bridge the gap we need to look with wide-open eyes and a wide-open heart for that place between what we are and what we hope to become.

> ***Without consciousness of the part of ourselves that is involved with money, we run the risk of becoming moral and spiritual beings with only one half of our nature—and therefore not really moral or spiritual at all.***
>
> ---Jacob Needleman, *Money and the Meaning of Life*

To navigate the Mobius strip of money with grace and understanding we need to examine our attitudes about money and where those attitudes originated. Money plays a strong role in our inner and outer lives. It's time to bring that role into clearer focus by looking closely at what we think and feel about money, and maybe even why we think and feel what we do.

The Clearness Committee, a Quaker practice of discernment, is important in our Circles of Trust for its use of open, honest questioning to assist the Focus Person in hearing his or her Inner Teacher. I offer the following questions to invite you to be the Focus Person and explore, perhaps through journaling, the light and the dark places along **your** personal Mobius strip of money. Remember, you cannot get to the truth if you are telling yourself what you want to hear rather than what is true.

These questions are invitations for you to use to explore more closely what you may have simply taken in without any conscious awareness at an earlier time in your life. Not all of the questions will resonate with everyone. Choose the ones that speak to you and seem to lead you toward self-discovery. Skip the rest, but notice if and where you experience inner resistance.

- What were your family's financial circumstances when you were born?

- When did you first learn something about money? Was it from your mother or your father? How old were you? What were the circumstances surrounding this learning event?

- How could you acquire money as a child? Did you do chores to earn money or were you given an allowance? How do you handle money with your own children?

- Do you remember the first time you bought something with money you had saved? What did you buy? How did you feel? Was it money you earned, or money that was given to you?

- What do you remember about your first paycheck?

- Did you dream of having a particular job or career when you were a child? Have you achieved this? Was the amount of money you could earn a factor in your choice of career?

- If your relationship with money were a personal relationship, how would you describe it?

- How do you relate to people who have more money than you?

- How do you relate to people who have less money than you?

- Do you recall your mother's or father's relationship with money? (Use your primary caregivers if mother and father are not appropriate.)

- What did you hear said about money?

- What did you **not** hear said about money?

- Have you ever given or received a gift of money? If yes, how much? For what reason(s)? How did you feel about this?

- Regarding money, for what do you want to be known?

- Regarding money, for what do you **not** want to be known?

- How does money correspond with your spirituality?

No man is great enough or wise enough for any of us to surrender our destiny to. The only way in which anyone can lead us is to restore to us the belief in our own guidance.
---Henry Miller

My husband asked me recently to be more specific about what guidance is and where it comes from. I found myself talking about background noise. It is there all of the time, but every now and then, the volume gets turned up and something comes through louder and clearer. It's not just auditory though; guidance can be visual or visceral or just plain intuitive. Some call it "trusting your gut" or "following your bliss." I have been known to describe myself as being moved beyond reason to do something. We live in a culture that promotes and rewards a sharp, successful-looking veneer, and that leaves us inarticulate about how to cultivate a meaningful inner life. Learning to recognize and follow guidance helps to nurture a wise heart.

As I wind down this chapter on moving at the speed of guidance, I want to take a moment to explore shadow and speed. Guidance sometimes tells us that plans need to change, relationships end, or decisions be revised. We may not always welcome guidance or want to do what we are being prompted to do. We may want to push back against guidance and many of us do just that.

Any path forward is not always well lit, hospitable, or even desirable. Sometimes guidance requires a lot more time and patience than we may be willing or able to expend. Just because we are receptive to and wish for guidance is absolutely no guarantee that it will show up.

Things do not always turn out the way we might have wanted, and sometimes we have to question whether guidance has our best interests at heart. I don't believe there are guarantees that accompany guidance. The challenge is not to assign labels like "right" or "wrong," "good" or "bad," but rather to hold the paradox of "both/and" and try to learn from all of our experiences.

To do so, we need only move at the speed of guidance.

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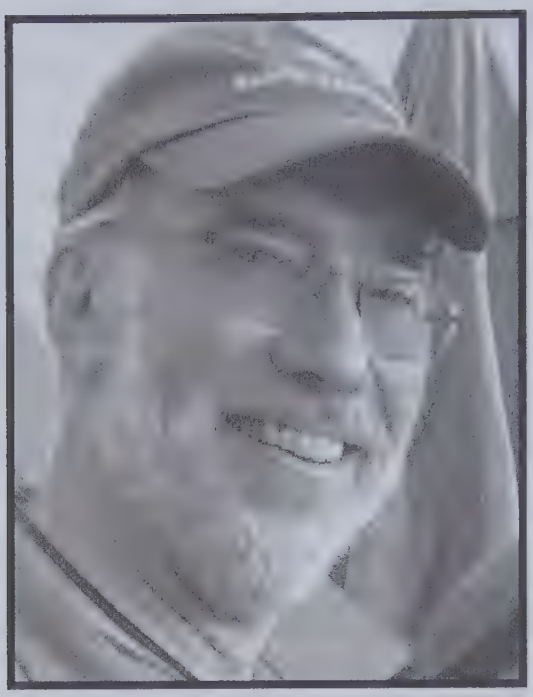

Learning to Be Vulnerable: A Courage & Renewal Men's Retreat

By Jeffrey M. Creswell

Breitenbush Hot Springs is the ideal place for holding a Courage & Renewal retreat for men. Located deep in the ancient Cascade forests between Mt. Hood and Mt. Jefferson in Oregon, where for hundreds of years, Kalapuya, Wasco, and Molalla people used the springs for medicinal and spiritual purposes, Breitenbush offers a sheltering, safe space for men to come together to experience the land, the healing waters, and the fellowship of one another.

As a Courage & Renewal facilitator for the last sixteen years I have always been curious about the fact that our work is dominated by women. In a circle of twenty people it would be unusual to have more than two or three men in addition to myself.

- Was there something about the work that made men uncomfortable?
- Would a retreat designed specifically for men be any different?
- Could we create safe space for men to be vulnerable and to show up with their true selves?

These were some of the questions I was holding as I began planning with Dan Hines for our men's retreat. We were happy to have fifteen men sign up for the retreat. It was a diverse group ranging in age from 24 to 74. We had two father-and-son pairs, three business partners, a climate scientist, and a sculptor. About two thirds of the men at the retreat had found us through the Breitenbush website, not through our traditional Courage & Renewal networks.

Our meeting space was a yurt down by the river; a lovely, warm, open space that felt comfortable and welcoming. Although we had arrived early in the afternoon, Breitenbush hosts many different groups so we would not meet our group until after dinner. As we set up our meeting space and formed our circle, we imagined who would be sitting here with us for the next three days. We went to a Breitenbush orientation meeting after dinner before our first session, and Dan and I both looked around at the men present, wondering who would be a part of our group? I made mental notes of the men I was sure would be in our circle and the ones that I was sure would not be.

I was wrong almost every time. So much for my stereotypes of men who would come to a Courage retreat.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

-Yehuda Amichai

Here we were, seventeen men sitting in a circle and reading these words as Dan spoke them aloud. The silence in the room was full. We looked at each other. We looked down. We closed our eyes. As for me, I took a deep breath and wondered if I could trust the process. Could we come together as a group of men to create a safe space where our souls would show up? Would I be able to hold this space with a group of men?

We gave each person a printed copy of the Touchstones and read them out loud. Here were the agreements we were making with each other. I have learned over the years of facilitating Courage Circles that these boundary markers are key to establishing safe space. But I wondered if they would work in a men-only retreat.

Trust the process, I said to myself. I know that it works and I know that I can rest into this offering. But it's not easy.

I have grown to deeply appreciate the concept of paradox in my Courage & Renewal work. One of the paradoxes I always hold as I begin a retreat is that I am responsible for holding the safe space for participants at the same time that I am holding a space for me to do my own inner work. I have always struggled with an image of masculinity that I didn't fit into very well. Here I was in a group of men who collectively represented all the things that I saw as traditionally male and that I didn't live up to. I wanted to be able to rest into this paradox and allow the work of our circle to work on me just as I wanted it to work on the men present.

After our first session Dan and I went to the hot springs for a soak before bed. We had so much anticipation, so much humility. We had already discovered that our preconceived ideas of who these men might be were completely wrong. This was a group of guys who were ready to show up. We were looking forward to the next morning when we were going to spend our time together on a hike in this beautiful mountain wilderness.

The next morning we started the day with a soak while we watched the sunrise on
 a misty, drizzly morning. I was aware of the sheltering, softening presence of the hot springs waters which seemed to be literally holding us, nurturing us, caring for us. There is a vulnerability to sitting naked in hot springs and relaxing in the warm waters. I could see that this was an essential part of our retreat, even though we all weren't going to the springs together. Yet the healing waters, which had been cradling and healing people for hundreds of years, were supporting us as we came together in our Circle of Trust.

Our morning hike began in a light drizzle. We hiked up to a beautiful rock outcropping that overlooked a valley with a river below. Much of the walk was done in silence. Silence was literally the ground on which we all stood throughout our time together. Silence was the space where we met each other, man to man, face to face. We didn't have to prove anything. We didn't have to be anything other than ourselves. And best of all we didn't have to try and live up to some unrealistic image of what it means to be a man. We walked in silence. We sat in silence. And we were able to be ourselves.

Dust in our eyes our own boots kicked up
Heartsick we nursed along the way we picked up
You may not see it when it's sticking to your skin
But we're better off for all that we let in

-The Indigo Girls

As we gathered in the afternoon after lunch and a soak, we listened to this song by the Indigo Girls. It seemed a fitting song following our morning walk. We had a time to journal and one of the prompts that we were offered proved powerful and transforming for me personally, the paradox of doing my own work while holding the space for others to do their work.

Having spent the last day and a half with this group of men it was so clear to me what was sticking to my skin. It was my image of what it means to be a man, an image that I now knew so clearly was wrong and no longer served me.

It was time to let it go.

In the safe space of this circle I knew I didn't have to live up to any image of what it means to be a man. I was already a man, fully, completely, beautifully a man just like all the rest of the men in our circle. I didn't have to prove anything to anyone because I was already accepted for who I was. It was time to let go of a struggle I had lived with since I was a teenager. It was time to live into my true self as a man.

We ended this session before dinner by reading *A Ritual to Read to Each Other*, a poem by William Stafford. We read it out loud together. The final stanza spoke deeply to me of the transformation happening in this group of men, and in me:

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to
sleep;
the signals we give - yes or no, or maybe -
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

That evening we had a short session and then invited anyone who wanted to come and have a soak in the silent pool. Pitch dark with only the stars for light, there was a closeness that didn't need words for those of us who went. It was enough just to know we were there together. Words were unnecessary.

The next morning was sunny and we spent it outside, letting the natural world speak to us in the silence. We each had an hour and a half to create something with the natural world around us, to let it speak to us, draw us out, inspire us. When we came back together, we walked around on a gallery walk to see each other's creations. I was most impressed by the variety of expressions.

Each man had created something that uniquely expressed his personality, his strengths, and his passions. There were works that were large and required a lot of physical effort to create. Then there were works that were delicate, simple and spare.

Some of the men took the entire time and barely finished. Others spent a lot of time in silence waiting to be inspired and finished early with time to just be and enjoy the sunshine. There was a great freedom in knowing that each of us could pay attention to our own inner teacher and do what was right for us.

The gallery walk was powerful. One of the men had a good camera and volunteered to photograph each work. Somehow this honored the work in a way that increased its stature. We walked through the forest, the meadow, down by the river, and were startled, surprised, amazed, delighted, and quieted by the different expressions we saw.

In the afternoon we held Clearness Committees. At this point in the retreat the group was ready for this process, the deepest and most powerful part of Courage & Renewal work. We had three committees. Again, spacious silence held each group and we sat with each other deeply listening. There was a sense of something profound in these clearness committees. I believe that for most of us this was a completely new experience. Men do not show their vulnerability to each other easily, if at all. This felt like sacred time.

After dinner we paired up and sat facing each other. We looked into each other's eyes. I was startled to realize how rarely I had ever looked directly into another man's eyes. It felt right in this circle where we had come to trust one another. We had one partner ask the question, "Who are you?" Without thinking about it, the other partner would answer; then the question was repeated. This went on for five minutes. Then, after a time of silence, the roles were switched. There were tears for many of us. For me, they were tears of gratitude and wonder. Being able to be myself in the company of men was so freeing. I felt great love for these men, my brothers, who had given me this gift.

On our last morning we had time to reflect on our experience together and share a walk and talk with a partner. It was good to listen to another man on the retreat and to hear his experience. I was able to talk about the transformation that had occurred in me. My partner shared a similarly profound transformation for him. We walked in the beautiful woods around Breitenbush and felt so held, by the place and by each other.

We allowed extra time at the end of the retreat before lunch, which was a good thing because the closing circle took two hours. Each man took the time to share from his heart about the retreat and how it had changed him. There was a lot of silence. There were silent tears. There was talk of change, of transformation. We had all been changed as men, as individuals, as fathers, sons, friends, brothers. Many of the men expressed the fact that they had never experienced this kind of vulnerability before and certainly never with other men.

I left this retreat changed.

I had helped to hold the space for this group of men and I had been able to do my own work. I left behind my old image of what it means to be a man, an image that had never served me well. I took with me a new sense of wholeness that came from the experience of being fully myself in a group of other men. Courage & Renewal work provides a safe space for men to encounter their own inner teachers, and in so doing, to encounter other men. We were able to share our vulnerability, our dreams, as well as our strength and our passion. We were able to be tender with each other and powerful with each other.

One of the men in the group, the youngest at 24, shared a song with us, which he taught us on the second day and we sang together. We sang it often after that as it expressed so much of what we experienced together. I believe that our world needs men who can sing these words with conviction, humility, and power:

I am a strong man. I am a loving man. I am a peacemaker; my soul will never die.
I am a strong man. I am a loving man. I am a peacemaker; my soul will never die.
I honor you and empower you to be who you are.
I honor you and empower you to be who you are.
I honor you and empower you to be who you are.

We decided that the song needed to be shared, so we organized a flash mob in the dining room. The man who taught us the song stood up and began to sing. We all joined him, and the room was filled with the strong, loving voices of seventeen men singing their truth to the people present. We made a point to turn to someone near us and sing the line ***"I honor you and empower you to be who you are,"*** as we looked them in the eyes.

There were cheers and applause when we finished. Afterwards a woman came up to Dan in tears. She shared that she had been in a workshop in the morning with women who had experienced sexual abuse. It had been a very emotionally painful morning for them.

I came into this retreat holding three questions. Reflecting back on these questions helped me to glean some of what I learned from this experience:

- ***Was there something about the work that made men uncomfortable?***
  I don't think this work itself made men uncomfortable. I think that the lack of a space where it feels safe to be vulnerable, particularly with other men, is what makes men uncomfortable. We do not have much experience of being vulnerable with one another and so we don't know how to create that kind of space for each other. The Touchstones which we put in place at the start of the retreat offered that kind of safety, allowing the men to be vulnerable with one another in such a bounded space. Being in nature added to our sense of creating a thin place where the soul was invited to show up.

- ***Would a retreat designed specifically for men be any different?***
  Having now been involved in two different retreats for only men, I do think that there are some differences than groups of men and women together. I believe that men need more spacious amounts of silence in order to settle into the space and show up with their whole selves. Men are used to being much more task oriented and taking charge so the silence provides a conscious way to slow down and disengage from the need to be in control.

  I also think that men need to spend more time together in the natural world interacting with each other while interacting with nature. Both the hike we took and the morning we spent creating Andy Goldsworthy inspired creations allowed us to be together while doing something. This seemed to provide a kind of intimacy that felt safer and more secure.

- ***Could we create safe space for men to be vulnerable and to show up with their true selves?***
  Our long and heartfelt closing circle was evidence of the fact that men could be vulnerable with one another. It also showed that men are hungry for this kind of intimacy with one another. I think that men lack the skill to create the safe space.

Each man who spoke at the closing circle spoke from a deep, vulnerable place. Men spoke of never having experienced this kind of vulnerability with other men. They spoke of the power of being in the presence of other men who shared their desire to live a life of integrity and purpose. The men who were focus persons in the clearness committee were deeply moved by the opportunity to listen to themselves in such an intimate way, an experience they said they had never had before.

One man who was the last to speak shared his difficulty with speaking up in a group. He said that he was often paralyzed when he had to speak. But he couldn't keep silent because the experience of the retreat had been so powerful for him. He felt like our time together had given him the courage to claim and use his voice.

There are so many good men in the world. Courage & Renewal Circles of Trust provide a way for good men to come together to support one another, to share with one another, to grow together. I am grateful for the opportunity to offer these circles to men. I am grateful for the way these circles have changed me.

Jeffrey M. Creswell (Jeff) lives in Portland, Oregon where he was an elementary school teacher for 32 years. He continues to share the Scottish Storyline method of curriculum integration with teachers worldwide. Jeff and his wife, Caryl, co-facilitate Courage and Renewal retreats in Oregon with Karen Noordhoff. The website for this work is www.couragecircleoftrust.org His email is creswell@me.com

Finding Myself in the Space Between

By Vicki Metzgar

I believe in synchronicity. For most of my life, I have had a dim awareness that when I had a need for something specific, there was usually a manifestation of some sort that filled my need. I always appreciated having my needs met in unusual and unforeseen ways, and I feel very fortunate to have had so many blessings.

I find myself reflecting on the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship and noticing a collection of small synchronicities, that, when added together, form a profound sense of meaning. These incidents surely were not accidental! I must pay attention to them, for together, they inform my experience of Kirkridge and the Courage Fellowship itself. These synchronous events point toward a spiritual epiphany.

Like many people, my spiritual journey has been, at times, twisted, and at other times, disconnected. Born into a family with deep ties in rural Southern culture and tradition, I was raised in a very evangelical tradition. Church was as important as breathing. It was where you went each week, and so did your extended family. I have come to treasure that experience, as it taught me many important lessons of life, but it has taken a lot of time and reflection to give that experience meaning in my life.

I was always headstrong (stubborn some might say). I thought that church was a waste of time, and I did not like being made to attend. Church just did not make sense to me. As a teenager, I rebelled and told my parents that, "as soon as I am old enough to make my own decisions, I won't attend church at all." I left church and all those God-fearing people behind once I began college.

However, all of that changed with the birth of my own children and my desire to rear them in a more rational spiritual tradition. After much "church shopping," my young family decided to join a small inner city Episcopal Church that had a rich tradition of outreach and reconciliation. I was attracted to the way people were able to approach religion rationally, while at the same time, they were welcoming in a broad open way. I thrived in that place and was deeply involved in all aspects of the parish, including several leadership positions. I studied and read widely of the many religious traditions as part of the Church's training for adults and as part of my own curiosity about the state of this world.

Once my children were grown, my life changed in some dramatic ways, and suddenly my relationship with the rational, reasonable, God-loving church with which I had become so involved became one of dissonance. I began to question the Church and its policies, which seemed more and more in conflict with my own beliefs. After 25 years of faithful attendance, I separated from the Church completely. I was disillusioned with Church leaders, whom I saw as greedy and power hungry, not to mention much more conservative socially than I could ever imagine myself. I suddenly found myself (stubbornly?) afloat in a sea of uncertainty about what I believed.

A DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

In the early 2000's, I became involved in work that spoke to my heart in ways I had not experienced since my early adulthood. Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* led me to become part of a movement that values connecting the soul and role of individuals. In my work as a retreat facilitator, I met and came to know amazing educators who were dedicated to working for the good of all children and were, simultaneously, broken-hearted by the "systems" within which they were forced to perform in ways that were the antithesis of their deeply held beliefs about how children should be educated. I felt as if I had finally found my calling, and I felt more connected to this movement than to any religious tradition. I saw the teachers in my Circles of Trust and my colleagues in facilitator preparation as my "spiritual" family. The people of this movement came from all traditions and religious backgrounds, and we found common ground in the work of the heart and in Circles of Trust.

As my professional career was coming to a close, my thoughts were not about continuing to do retreat facilitation, but an interesting synchronicity entered my life. I received an intriguing invitation to join a group of Circle of Trust facilitators in the

Courage Fellowship at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in Pennsylvania. I looked over the application and found all of it simple to follow, but then I came to one question that completely stumped me. As much as I was drawn to this Kirkridge program and the opportunities it offered for me to continue doing the work I love, there was one question that set me on edge: What is your religious identification? It had been many years since I claimed any religion. My earlier experiences set me against most religions for what I thought would be a lifetime.

So I called the program leader, Sally Z. Hare, as I felt I needed to come clean and admit as much to her, in light of this generous offer of Fellowship with valued Courage colleagues. I should have known, really; Sally always finds a way to open a path to trustworthy spaces. Her response was that the question was a way of looking at diversity in the selection process, and *no religious identification* was a perfectly appropriate response.

Then she turned the question to me: "Have you read Caroline Fairless' book, *The Space Between Church and Not Church?*" I admitted that I had not and immediately ordered a copy. In those pages, I found a description of sacred space that I could embrace with all my being. For over 20 years, I had wrestled with feeling extremely disconnected from my Episcopal roots and faith, and as I read *The Space Between*, I was struck by Fairless' description of "the space":

> **There is a space between things, between all things. The space is sacred and it is rich with blessing...that space between church and what the church refers to as "the world"... I talk to people from churches who, although they continue in their congregations, are nonetheless articulating a longing for a depth of sacred connection that lies beyond their Sunday morning experiences. ...people outside churches want the sacredness of the natural world without the Jesus overlay. (Preface, page xiii)**

The concept of "space between" resonated with me in a way that few ideas had in my lifetime. Not only was it refreshing to me conceptually, but it was calling to another deep belief of my own about the state of Earth and our sacred duty to preserve it for the future of humanity. Here, I had found a deep description of my own spiritual dilemma.

I applied for the Fellowship. Now that I am nearing its end, I am noticing other synchronous events that speak to my longing for finding a "space between" for us all. It seems, everywhere I turn, **SPACE** has found its way to my consciousness.

Working with a group of Kirkridge Courage Fellows on a potential grant proposal, we shared the article *Into the Field* from Orion Magazine. The author, Amanda Giracca, recounts her experience visiting her alma mater, Prescott College in Arizona. She

relates her experience with an undergraduate ecology professor, Bob Ellis. As she visits Professor Ellis on a class field study, Giracca recounts how he seeks to take students into the field in order to "ground truth" the concepts and theories his students have been studying in the textbook and classroom. For Giracca, *"it felt more like reflective conversation: What do you notice? What do you think? What do you make of all this information you're steeped in, and what are you going to do with it? (p. 2)"*

Then, as Giracca thinks about her own freshman writing course and the students she teaches, mostly biology majors seeking their way into medical school, she laments that they do not have any undergraduate experience that requires field studies in natural settings. Instead, *"their curriculum is comprised of large lectures and labs held inside."* She writes:

> ***It's experience in its purest form that seems to be missing, for my students and for many college students in the United States---exposure to the world, whether it's the wilderness, a city neighborhood, or a polluted stream trickling through campus. What's increasingly lost is the chance to be brought out into the huge, wild mess of it and be asked, "So, what do you make of all this?" (p. 5)***

MY OWN GROUND TRUTHING

As a high school Biology teacher, I felt that "ground truthing" was invaluable in teaching students about the beauty, complexity, and interconnected character of the natural world. I count among my most cherished memories of teaching those that were experienced outside, on the 40-acre campus where I taught. In building our own nature trail, students discovered amazing animals, like the flying squirrel that occupied the hollow of a tree on campus. On bleak winter days, my students could cross the road and search the bare woods for downed logs. We found termites inside dead logs and took them back to the lab to reveal the mutually-beneficial lifestyle enjoyed by the termites and microscopic inhabitants of their gut, which made digesting all that wood possible. These fascinating creatures could not survive without each other.

For me it feels a lot like the work of Circles of Trust (COT) that my fellow Kirkridge facilitators and I have been practicing in order to create the space for people to bring their lives into congruence with their deeply-held beliefs. Much of the COT work is done in natural settings, and for a reason. In small and large groups, COT facilitators ask similar questions as Professor Ellis:

What do you notice?
What do you think?
What do you make of all this?
What are you going to do about it?

Such questions prompt silent reflection, journaling, and discussion to allow participants to hear the wisdom of their own "inner teacher" that can guide them to understanding their place in the world and their priorities for living congruent lives.

THE SPACE BETWEEN ALL THINGS

Synchronicity once again brought important ideas to my attention as I listened to an *On Being* podcast with Krista Tippett interviewing Frank Wilczek. Dr. Wilczek is a Nobel laureate and MIT professor of theoretical physics and mathematics. Their discussion was about Wilczek's recent book, *A Beautiful Question*, which opens with a single question: Does the world embody beautiful ideas? I was so caught up by the interview that I got the book. Here again, in yet another format, was an inquiry into the "space between."

In the quest for finding the answer to this overarching question of beautiful ideas, Wilczek takes the reader on an historic journey through the development of the fundamental ideas of mathematics and physics, from Pythagoras and Plato to Newton, Maxwell, Faraday, and Einstein. Wilczek credits Pythagoras with discovery of "*a most fundamental relationship between numbers....and sizes and shapes*" in his Pythagorean Theorem. Wilczek writes, "*because Number is the purest product of mind, while Size is a primary characteristic of Matter, that discovery revealed a hidden unity between Mind and Matter.*" He also notes that Pythagoras discovered the relationship between numbers and musical harmony, which he contends "*... completes a trinity, Mind-Matter-Beauty, with Number as the linking thread.*" *These discoveries led Pythagoras to propose that "All Things Are Number."* Thus, for Wilczek, the Beautiful Question arises!

Wilczek goes on to remind his reader that Plato is celebrated for his metaphor of the Cave, *"raising important emotional and philosophical aspects of our relationship...with reality."* Plato "*imagined a mediating demiurge...who rendered the realm of perfect, eternal Ideas into its imperfect copy, the world we experience. Here, the concept of the world as a work of art is explicit*" (p. 5).

Mathematical ideals form the guideposts in Wilczek's search for answers. He proposes, *"Two obsessions are the hallmarks of Nature's artistic style: Symmetry---a love of harmony, balance, and proportion, and Economy--satisfaction in producing an abundance of effects from very limited means"* (p. 11). So the quest proceeds.

The search continues for Wilczek as he approaches the topic of Space. He notes that "*Newton's physics left space empty, but he was not happy about it*" (p. 118). As I am not a physicist, I had really never pondered the actual nature of space. For me, space has always meant that there was no thing there, but as I read more, I came to understand that "space" is something more than a void. Apparently, Newton was aware that this concept of Space as a void was inadequate to explain his theory of gravity and its properties, but he was unable to find another explanation to explain the observable properties of objects. I am suddenly confronted with a conceptual understanding of Space as a Medium, not a void. My mind is blown! Now I see Space so differently, as if, all of a sudden, I am able to see ultraviolet light, and I am able to see a whole new world and understand my own better.

SPACE AS A BEAUTIFUL MEDIUM

As if to confirm my new understanding of Space as a Medium, I had another synchronous event right around the corner. A trip to the Berkshires took me to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and as I walked into the building, I noticed that, in the pavement of the parking lot, shiny golden filled each of the cracks. It seemed a bit strange, but I did not think much about it.

Once inside, I found a brochure describing an exhibit called *The Space Between*.
 I could not ignore such a blatant synchronous signal as this! Inside the brochure I found a picture of the very cracks in the pavement I had noticed in the parking lot. Come to find out, the cracks were actually part of The Space Between exhibit. A quote from the artist, Rachel Sussman of Baltimore, Maryland, described the work as *Sidewalk Kintsukuroi*. Sussman's installation restores the cracks in the pavement by adapting the Japanese art of *kintsukuroi,* in which gold is used to repair broken ceramics. Japanese tradition treasures these restored ceramics as more valuable for having been broken. This was bringing ever more clarity and resolution to my concept of the space between.

KIRKRIDGE AS THE SPACE BETWEEN

Finally, I am able to more fully describe how the experiences of Kirkridge and the Courage Fellowship have changed my perception of so many things. Kirkridge is described in one brochure in this way:

> ***Kirkridge sits on the Kittatinny Ridge of the Pocono Mountains, part of the Appalachian Range. Located in eastern Pennsylvania, less than two hours from New York City, Kirkridge is often, like the island of Iona, called "a thin place," a place where the distance between heaven and earth collapses, where the soul might show up.***

There it is! That "thin place." It is the place where one might encounter heaven and earth. It is about that space between where I now see energy and motion, not emptiness and void.

> ***For the past 75 years, [Kirkridge has] served a thriving Christian and interfaith community. Looking ahead, we plan on serving an even wider community of people of good faith, no faith, and interfaith – and providing safe harbor to all. Our historic motto of "picket and pray" has now extended itself "to protect, tend, and embrace." From the peak of the ridge to the clear waters in the valley below, the new century calls for stewardship, nurturing, and embracing inner stability with outer sustainability.*** (http://www.kirkridge.org)

Now this synchronicity makes sense to me. All along, I have been experiencing Kirkridge without the ability to translate my experience of the place to others. Now I can see that Kirkridge IS the ***space between***. It is that thin place between heaven and earth. It is the place that makes me able to take my reality and see meaning and purpose that is somehow reconnecting my soul and my role in the world. It is the space that, like a beautiful question answered, is not void of action, but full of energy, motion, and matter. It is harmony and beauty alive with everyday experience. The people of Kirkridge, as well as those in the Fellowship, are meeting in that space between church and not-church to attempt to bring ourselves and others into congruence with the inner teacher and voice of conscience. We are all broken, but mended with golden fillings that make us more valuable for having been broken and able to relate more readily to a broken world.

I continue my search at Kirkridge, which has become, for me, the embodiment of the space between. Here I have found a place that is not part of my everyday job or working life routine. Here, there is space for ground-truthing the meaning of creation and my place in it. Here, there is for me a deep spiritual connection and experience. And if I stop and look deeply at the world from this place, I can see through to new dimensions, new visions of possibility, and new understandings of things unknown until now. And so, my quest continues.

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Engaging in Culture Change in Academic Medicine

By Linda Pololi

I am a physician and I have spent most of my career in medical schools and their teaching hospitals. My last such affiliation was as Professor of Medicine and Vice Chancellor for Education at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Currently, I work in the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University. My work efforts have always focused on the personal and professional development of medical school faculty and, in extension, on the overall culture of academic medicine. I have been fortunate over the past 20 years to have had many opportunities to design, develop, and implement professional development and mentoring programs for physicians and scientists. For the most part, these programs - and particularly the dimensions that draw upon the principles and practices of the Center for Courage & Renewal are countercultural to the usual offerings in academic medicine; as such, it has been a source of great personal gratification for me and for the medical faculty participants in my courses to be able to participate in such work.

One overarching aim for my work is to help academic physicians and scientists focus on the work that is most meaningful to them, that is congruent with their own deeply held values, and that allows them to preserve a compassionate approach

to patients. How can these talented and hardworking individuals address best the needs of our nation's healthcare while sustaining their own humanity and vitality in roles that are very demanding, both intellectually and emotionally? These have been the compelling reasons for me to persist in this work.

I believe that what started me on this road was the wrenching experience of looking after a dear acute leukemia patient in Chicago. I was then a young physician and assigned to my care was an elderly, dignified, and poorly educated African American woman, Mrs. Y. We treated her intensively and plied her body with chemotherapy, platelets, red blood cells and white blood cells, as her life waned. I eventually married the physician who alongside me had cared for this patient and shared the same deep sorrow I felt when our patient eventually died. Shortly after, we moved to Providence, RI, where my husband was offered a position at Brown University. I made the decision to temporarily give up the practice of medicine to look lovingly after our two small sons. I determined then that I didn't want to return to the practice of Hematology and Oncology. I felt that my efforts would better serve our societal needs by focusing in preventive medicine.

When I did return to medicine after a few years, I chose to take a position in General Internal Medicine. In that capacity, as a faculty member in the School of Medicine at Brown, I practiced medicine and supervised physicians in training. I became fascinated by medical education and how one might be able to facilitate behavior change in one's patients to aid their wellbeing and prevent illness. I found out that our physicians and medical students lacked, for the most part, insight into their own behavior.

As part of the education modules I developed, I incorporated the opportunity for medical students and residents to change their own behavior as a way for them to understand better this complex process.

At the same time, I learned about the American Academy on Physician and Patients (AAPP), a group that aims to improve effective communication between physicians and patients. I joined the organization and was drawn into its mission to improve interviewing skills - that is, the words to say to patients to form therapeutic relationships with them and to alleviate their fears, which would also be helpful in promoting behavioral change. A major focus of AAPP training programs was the development of personal awareness by physicians, since many of us have difficulty in handling the emotional toll of medicine as evidenced by our poor communication skills with patients. I became part of the facilitator-in-training program of the AAPP (now called the American Academy on Communication in Healthcare) and eventually was certified as a facilitator for its national faculty development programs to teach interviewing skills and effective relationship formation skills for physicians.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR A CHANGE

Out of these experiences, I came to hear about the lives of physicians and the daily effects of the practice and professional organization of medicine on their souls. This cycle was repeated for me at my subsequent job in North Carolina where I was given responsibility for "curriculum reform" of medical student education at the school. What I learned there was that students were enthusiastic about more humanistic ways that facilitated their learning in medical school. Many faculty, however, didn't understand why they should, or how to, teach differently as they had only experienced traditional and somewhat abusive forms of medical education themselves. To address this, I started programs for faculty that offered them the experience of learning in ways that involved the development of personal awareness, trusting communities embodying relationship formation and the type of culture that I thought would better serve not only our faculty but also their medical students and patients.

At some point, when I was myself deeply hurt and traumatized by the organizational culture at my last position in a medical school, I moved to Brandeis University and started a research project, the National Initiative on Gender, Culture and Leadership in Medicine – frequently called "C - Change" for culture change. I passionately wanted to change for the better the existing culture of academic medicine as I had become increasingly aware of many faculty in academic medicine who were also being wounded and changed adversely by this culture. Faculty were becoming cynical, with lowered vitality, or they left academic medicine altogether.

Through my various medical school responsibilities earlier, I had become familiar with the personal lives of the faculty from the stories they told me about their own experiences. However, we also needed rigorous scientific data to document the effects of this stressful culture and understand what could be a foundation for possible future change. After my arrival at Brandeis University, I managed to secure a very generous grant from the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation to do this work and I was able to gather a talented, interdisciplinary team of experts to work on the project. We launched a national research program, conducting initially and recording a set of 100 in-depth interviews of medical school faculty from across the country. The findings of the interview study were very sobering and uncomfortable to read. For example, faculty described feeling very isolated and depersonalized in their roles:

> *"This is a place that doesn't recognize you as an individual; no one is interested in what a fun, interesting person I am. There is nobody who is interested in that. They're interested in the work I do, perhaps. But nobody cares what makes me tick here. I'm completely invisible – as a human – as a person."*

"I couldn't pick out anybody that I corresponded with by email or letters out of a line-up. I knew very few people in different divisions. It was very much an isolated situation. Go to your clinic, do your thing, go back to your office, go to the medical suite, do your procedures, go back to the office..."

"Check your humanity at the door, that was how it felt. Any sign of... this is going to sounds harsh, but... any tendency towards kindness was viewed as weakness."

Faculty, physicians in training (residents) and medical students frequently reported a sense of not belonging in their work environments, of not being able to express their opinions freely without fear of retribution, of ethical and moral distress, of feeling disrespected, and unsupported.

"Well, I think the hardest thing for me was to be in a department where you couldn't express yourself [your opinion] without feeling that you were jeopardizing your career. The hardest thing was that I wasn't honest to myself sometimes and because I was afraid earlier on that I would lose my job - I would get kicked out of the department."

We found a significant gap between the values held personally by the faculty and those they observed being prevalent in the organization.

"So while we have this emerging technology and the ability to treat patients, we have no sense of social purpose or social policy."

"But in an academic institution that doesn't value community, culture, partnerships, collaboration, I wouldn't have wanted to stay there. That's where I was going and what I valued, it was a dead end."

Some faculty described being adversely changed by the culture:

"And there were colleagues of mine to whom power meant a great deal and I watched them become people I didn't like as they dealt with this hostility and grabbed for power, and they achieved a great deal and I don't take it away from them, but in the course of it, they lost their humanity. They became people I could no longer respect. They became dishonest and manipulative and I just wasn't willing to go there."

Discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity and gender was widely felt:

"What I struggled with for a long time was my being an African American woman, in a male, white male dominated institution and the feeling that I was invisible. My opinion didn't matter, what I was feeling didn't matter. There were people who I passed every single day who were chairmen of departments, and I mean, good God, after five years you've got to see a person."

"I sent my resume for something and when I showed up someone said to me, 'Your resume didn't look black.' Can you imagine someone saying that?"

We decided then that we needed to find out how representative the perspectives of the initial 100 faculty we interviewed were, so we turned their words into an extensive survey. We surveyed faculty nationally in a balanced but random selection of 26 U.S. medical schools and have published many of our research findings. Through these qualitative and quantitative research studies, we documented that the culture of academic medicine is fiercely individualistic, competitive, harshly non-relational and discriminatory.

DOCUMENTING THE NEED FOR A CHANGE

When we have continued to survey medical schools in the U.S. and Canada and Europe, we are finding the same results. For example, in the U.S. 38% of male and 46% of female faculty say they feel burnt out. Twenty-nine percent of faculty agree with the statement, "I feel isolated here." Twenty-one percent of male faculty and 31% of female faculty say they feel ignored or invisible. Only 54% of the faculty agree that their values are well aligned with the values exhibited by their respective institutions. Fifty percent report that "the administration is only interested in me for the revenue I generate." Eleven percent of the faculty find work to be "dehumanizing," and 25% of the faculty say "the culture of my institution discourages altruism." Twenty-two percent of the faculty agree with the statement "I find myself being more aggressive here than I like." Just 64% of faculty feel confident that they can overcome whatever professional barriers they encounter.

Faculty turnover in academic medicine is huge, there are significant ethical issues in the professional behaviors of physicians and medical scientists, and the existing culture provides big challenges to faculty of color, as well as to the advancement of women into leadership roles. I am not a survey statistician like some members of my research team, but more of a change agent, and I am excited to be able to use our research findings to inform the development of new programs for medical school faculty that aim to cultivate the experience of a humanistic, relational and inclusive culture – small communities of learning for diverse groups of faculty. Thus, creating humanistic, relational and inclusive environments for faculty and students has become the overarching goal of my career in medicine for the last 25 years. To experience such a culture is the prime aim of the programs that I now offer to medical schools. An additional prominent theme in the programs is an appreciation of differences, particularly of cultural and racial nature.

In these C - Change faculty development programs there is intense focus on enhancing each person's understanding of their own deeply held-values and beliefs, helping them decide what is most meaningful to them. We focus on the realization

of a person's humanity and how that can manifest in their work. The structure of the programs is essentially relationship–based and facilitates the formation of relationships between participants. The programs aim to nourish the "deeply human" in the faculty participants and help them develop self-awareness. With this comes the ability to bring all of oneself to one's work, to be authentic, find work meaningful and more energizing. Below are a couple of comments written by former participants in such mentoring programs I have implemented:

> *"The program provided the opportunity to think about and define clearly my core values, and to redefine the idea of career and success with core values in mind."*
>
> *"What was most meaningful was the license and protected time/space to perform self-reflection. In doing so, it allowed me to understand more fully where my ambitions lay and in what way I was not being true to myself."*
>
> *"Relationships absolutely are the magic of the program. I can actually see a lot of potential collaborations and relationships moving forward and so I'm excited about that."*

In our courses, we structure time for reflective practices, authentic conversations, appreciation of differences, and then we help participating faculty think through how this experience applies to their careers and choices. Faculty learn how to develop practices at work to support these dimensions in colleagues and learners so that they might become habits and an integral part of the day.

In these group-mentoring programs, I have mostly designed and facilitated on my own. Over the years, I have become more confident in anticipating that this solo practice will have good results. Recently, program attendance has been a marvelous 95% in five cohorts of faculty over four years who met for monthly daylong retreats, and the participants wrote moving accounts of their experiences in the programs. Once one understands the power, trustworthiness, and value of the group, attendance becomes a priority. Even so, I have felt lonely not having partnership for myself in preparing, presenting and debriefing the sessions.

FINDING MY OWN SPACE

When I first read the description of the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, I immediately recognized the Fellowship as such a wonderful opportunity, along with the promise of new friendships, perspectives, and learning. I hoped that in the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, I would be able to focus on developing my own deeper understanding and humanity, as well as understanding others in the group and being there for them. I would be able to enhance my facilitation skills and expand the types of programs that I might offer in the future. While I am facilitating, I often have to put my own needs aside

and prioritize the needs of the group. I have found it difficult to take the necessary time and develop the ways to attend to the personal awareness part of my practice. I have always hoped to find a trusted group to enrich this aspect and to help my work and me.

In former years when I was based in medical schools, I had easier access to medical colleagues with whom I could partner. During both the AAPP and Center for Courage & Renewal facilitator preparation programs, I enjoyed and valued the opportunity to learn with and from my colleagues, but now I am considered mostly an instructor for such training.

I have found it difficult to know where to find the encouragement that I need in my work. As Leonard Cohen said when asked about where he found the inspiration for his songs, *"If I knew, I'd go there more often."* I have tried to create similar relationships with colleagues, and I do have many friends in medicine that I could call on, but without the structure of a fellowship I find that it's really difficult for a group to maintain this purpose due to everyone's multiple responsibilities and calls on their time.

The Kirkridge Courage Fellowship offered me the learning and friendships to enrich my practice and my work. I have felt fully accepted by the group of fellows, whereas in medicine I usually felt like an outsider. Participation has helped me be more self-aware and reflective about myself. Something else that attracted me to the Fellowship was that throughout my career in academic medicine, I have usually found myself working in groups that are majority male; I am one of few women who have landed in leadership roles in U.S. academic medicine. Now the Fellowship offers a space for me to enjoy having a good number of women in a working group.

The Kirkridge Fellowship provided me with the deep generosity and sense of belonging I had such difficulty finding in organized academic medicine. The program structure allowed me time, space, and support, to access my inner self and for listening to my inner voice. This teaches me how to live in my work.

It is this deep well of generosity, trustworthy relationships, and sense of belonging that I also try to recreate in the programs I offer for groups of medical school faculty. At Kirkridge Fellowship meetings, within this most thoughtful of environments, we participated in structured approaches to explore our "shadow selves," based on Jungian psychology. I found this area of inquiry fascinating. I became more aware of my own competitive nature, and of other aspects of my personality/self that react differently in various situations and that had been molded at least in part during my time in organized medicine. It's hard to know whether these attributes of myself were cultivated within the academic medicine culture, or were part of what led me there in the first place. It probably doesn't matter, but acknowledging these traits in myself allows me to make better choices regarding collaboration and to offer better experiences within the programs I facilitate. Intuitively, I know that for me a lot of

this work revolves around the issue of true collaboration. What is that, under what circumstances can true collaboration be felt and accomplished? Is it just with true love and abundant generosity? I don't come from a background that practiced generosity, but I do want to practice and receive it. What is the shadow side of generosity? I find that I am more drawn to this work than to medicine.

Just as I have benefited from my own experiences in the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, I continue to hope that through the C - Change program experiences of a different culture, medical faculty will return to their medical schools and teaching hospitals invigorated and with a clearer sense of their own values and self-worth. In turn, faculty will be able to model these attributes and program methods for their own colleagues, trainees, and students.

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Reclaiming the Commons

By Jean Richardson

I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay till sundown, for going out ... was really going in."

John Muir, 1938

I have always loved the outdoors. Like John Muir, going out for me is really going in.

Years ago, when trying to explain to my parents why I made a radical move from San Francisco to the very rural setting of Ghost Ranch in Northern New Mexico, my father stopped me in mid-sentence and said, "Face it, Jean, you always were a camper at heart." He was exactly right then and the same is true now.

I have been following my camper heart for many years. My camper heart calls me out into the quiet mountains, invites me to the waters of the river, and encourages me to sit in silence listening to the sounds of the seasons. After I was rejected by the church I loved because I was a lesbian, it was my camper heart that healed my soul, reminded me of the inclusive wholeness witnessed in nature, and provided me a wider theological landscape to explore my own spiritual questions and inner life. From years of work in pastoral ministry I had truly come to embody the words of Leonard Cohen's song, *The Future*:

The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold and it has overturned the order of the soul.

That blizzard guided my camper heart to Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center more than a decade ago. It is my camper heart that speaks to me still on this ancient mountain as the executive director of this "beacon on the hill." Over the years I have learned many lessons here and have come to understand the value of this natural sanctuary.

By the time I arrived at Kirkridge in 2005, the blizzard of the world had crossed the threshold into my life and my soul had been turned over. It is said that you do the work you most need to learn in life. Like many others, I have found this to be true. As a pastor, more often than not, I wrote sermons that I most needed to hear. I declared forgiveness to others that I needed to offer to myself. I worked for radical inclusion in the church because of the deep exclusion I experienced in my own life.

Arriving at Kirkridge, I had little idea of how deeply I needed to restore my soul. At Ghost Ranch in New Mexico and now as the director of Kirkridge Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, for well over 23 years, I have witnessed the change that takes place with individuals when nature's quiet and beautiful abundance are mixed with a generous portion of hospitality and acceptance. I believe Robert Raines, author and former director of Kirkridge, got it best when he would offer this welcome to Kirkridge visitors:

> *Like Chaucer's pilgrims we are stopping over for a couple of nights of rest in this inn and to tell each other some of the stories of our lives. ...If you brought some of your demons with you, remember that your angels are with you too. This mountain welcomes you. ... This ancient rock has been here for 300 million years. Whatever sin or sorrow, grief or anger, you've brought, the mountain is not appalled. It's seen and heard it all. It is one of the arms of God where it's safe to lean awhile.*

For some divine mysterious reason, it is safe and good for our souls to lean on ancient rocks over 300 million years old. As I write this piece in my Kirkridge office, I am observing women and men from a New York City seminary as they stand below my window, taking in the vista and breathing in the common landscape. Placed on an ancient mountain where we believe the earth first crested, Kirkridge holds steady and proclaims the hospitality of our earth that offers abundance in every season. Here we are reminded of what Thomas Merton called our individual and communal "hidden wholeness":

This mysterious Unity, and Integrity, is Wisdom, the Mother of all, Natura naturans.

Kirkridge is a gift, left in trust by those who went before us so we and future generations might remember our wholeness and listen for our true names as individuals and as a

community, surrounded by the healing gift of natural beauty. Like a national treasure or park, there is no claim on the ownership of Kirkridge. This is a radical reality. There is no denominational ownership or shareholders with financial investments at stake. Rather, over the years, Kirkridge has hosted a parade of supporters who come and go, donate and volunteer, serve on the board, work and care for this place based on a common understanding of its contribution to our world.

Since its conception, Kirkridge has been rooted in embracing the sacred and honoring the common good in our lives. If Kirkridge had a "mother church," it would be the Iona Community of Scotland founded in 1939. The Iona Community was, and still is today, a movement built upon a deep understanding of establishing a religious community based on working for the common good. George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona community, stated that for any community to survive it needed to come together around a "common demanding task"... A task that would take everyone's skills, and need everyone's gifts and talents, to accomplish.

Heather Menzies in her book, *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good,* writes:

> ***The word common originally meant "together-as one," "shared alike" and "bound together by obligation."***

Since the beginning, the great and demanding task of establishing and maintaining Kirkridge has been invitational. Survival through the years has been no one person's job to accomplish or take credit for accomplishing. We work and volunteer here because at our core we believe that it is for the common good of all that places like Kirkridge survive. Just like our national parks, retreat centers are good for our common soul.

Soul work is not easy and indeed takes courage. My mother used to say, "Life is not for the faint of heart." Her words ring true for me, and equally true is the fact that when we allow others to hear and hold our hearts, the journey of life takes on a new possibility away from an individualistic challenge to a gift of the common.

Knowing the critical gift of undeveloped land Kirkridge offers to our world, the board recently acted to place more than half of the property, 107 acres, into permanent land easement with The Nature Conservancy. The Board acted to assure that a portion of this land would never be vulnerable to private development or acquired for personal gain. This act guaranteed a contiguous watershed from the top of the ridge to the Delaware River, offering clean water to future generations, a gift for the common good.

The Kirkridge Governing Board is living into Rachel Carson's words from 1956: *"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."* We need "reserves of strength" to face the complexities threatening our planet. As elders we must assure that future generations will have places where

they too can discover "reserves of strength" and be reminded of our common task to seek justice and work for kindness.

We also need places that honor the divine Spirit of this life. Terry Tempest Williams in *The Hour of Land,* celebrating the centennial birthday of our national parks, describes Acadia National Park in Maine as "another breathing space." Williams goes on to say, *"Perhaps that is what parks are – breathing spaces for a society that increasingly holds its breath."*

Kirkridge is not only a place where individuals are invited to breathe; it is a place that honors our very breath. The Hebrew word for **breath**, *ruach, also* means **wind** or **spirit**. I believe Kirkridge is what George Macleod, founder of the Iona Community, described as *a thin space*. The Celts, have a saying that *"Heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller."* Thin places offer a rare light that reveals the divine in our natural world, in us and in one another.

When I interviewed for my position as executive director of Kirkridge, I carried Parker Palmer's book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, under my arm. I knew then, as I know now, that Courage Work was critical for our time and the right partner for our retreat center. From its beginning Kirkridge has honored our deep need to live seamlessly, in the way Parker Palmer describes as life on the Mobius strip. "Picket and pray" has been the historic motto of Kirkridge, as from its beginning, pilgrims at this retreat center have been invited to take time out from the demands of the world for prayer, silence, and reflection, restoring their commitment to go back out into the world and work for the common good. The essential DNA has remained the same for 75 years.

Over the years I have learned to live into the simple paradox I first learned as a congregational pastor and now as the director of this sacred place. When I focus on healing the wounds and divisions in my own life, I allow space for others to do the same. When I offer grace to myself, it is easier for me to offer grace to others.

As I learn to trust my own inner teacher, I can trust and not judge when others follow their own hearts. When I deeply appreciate my own gifts and value my own unique contributions in the world, I can encourage the gifts and contributions that each individual offers to the whole. Gathering in Circles of Trust, both as a participant and as a facilitator, has offered me this gift. It is the paradox that the restoration of one's own soul allows space for others to do the same. My work in retreat settings heals my heart, calls me inward, tests my passion for justice, and challenges my commitment for inclusion.

There is a room at Kirkridge named the Lenape Room, in honor of the First Nations people who lived in this region of the Eastern American continent. The room is filled with photos of founders and famous leaders who led theological and justice revolutions

in decades past. There is one poster that stands out for me personally more than any other. It is a portrait of Rosa Parks sitting on a bus. Although many Civil Rights leaders came to this mountain, as far as I know, Rosa Parks never found her way to Kirkridge. Her story reminds me daily of why I engage in and am so passionate about my work as a director of this retreat center.

I deeply believe that lives are changed here.

When women and men dare connect to their truest selves and experience a deep connection with one another, a new energy emerges. Courage is found and courage is acted upon. Rosa Parks symbolizes this metamorphosis for me. Yet her life took on new meaning as she sat in circles at the Highlander Center in Tennessee during the Civil Rights Movement. She found the courage to sit down in the front of the bus because she knew that her act was for the "common good." Not only was she not willing to participate in her own diminishment, as Parker Palmer writes in *The Courage to Teach*, but she knew that her action was connected to the "common good."

Rosa Parks was able to find the courage to sit down because she knew that she was not alone in her act of public disobedience. Miss Parks trusted that she was supported by a larger circle of courageous people who would never abandon her. Retreat centers build such communities. I have always held the truth close to my heart that the Civil Rights Movement was a success in large part because of the relationships forged between blacks and whites in circles that inspired common dreams. Dreams were made into reality in large part because of seeds planted in a small retreat center called Highlander in the Tennessee mountains.

Over the years Kirkridge has played a major part in both the underground of American history and carving the future of movements. Weekends at Kirkridge have inspired many actions of civil disobedience related to anti-nuclear movement, the Viet Nam war, Latin America and LGBTQ civil rights. Since 1977, Kirkridge led the way in the church by providing hospitality to Gay and Lesbian Christians and their allies who gathered here annually for support and affirmation.

Daniel Berrigan, the only Catholic priest ever to be placed on the FBI's most wanted list for his actions against the Viet Nam war, was a regular at Kirkridge for decades and found one of his spiritual homes here. In his own words:

> ***Let us imagine a time when the whole world seemed to have gone mad, when there was heard throughout the land a huge slamming of doors like cannons going off.***
>
> ***Suppose, though, something else. In a distant place, quite off the beaten path, a few people went counter to the cultural ruck and wrath. They continued to welcome guests, kept them in***

heart, feeling, memory. Cherished them, beckoned them in, spread the board, cleared time and place for the widest (and wildest) variety of the human. No outsiders, no pariahs, no stigma- an utmost, unforced spirituality. A place shaped like a heart.

No supposition this. But plain, steady, consistent, surprising. And humming like a hive, secreting years of sweetness and lavishly giving it all away.

Kirkridge. Dear Friends, innkeepers of the open door, multitudes shall arise and call you blessed.

We are in such a time in our nation and in the world: a time when division in our communities and the language of "the other" is evident in our vocabulary. At Kirkridge we offer space for conversation and dialogue as we gather around common tables for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is no special room service for presenters. We gather together, sharing our common stories.

Together we become what Terry Tempest Williams describes as an "*ecotone,* ... the border area where town patches meet that have different ecological composition." She continues, *"Call it a mete of creativity where the great diversity of species meet."*

Not long ago I heard an older woman say, "This weekend has been so wonderful; I have never spoken with a convicted felon before, and this weekend I have heard his story, and now I understand the need for prison reform." Over meals and good food, her table became an *ecotone*.

We meet as companions on our common life passage at Kirkridge. People who might never find reasons to connect outside of Kirkridge find reasons to share their journeys here. We meet across class, economic barriers, cultures, and race. We meet across sexual orientation, faith beliefs, political ideologies, and generational understandings. Trust is formed and commonalities of the human experience are discovered.

Never doubt the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

--Margaret Meade

The Kirkridge Courage Fellows embody one of the recent incarnations of individuals who understand the DNA of Kirkridge. Each Fellow is an experienced facilitator of Courage & Renewal Work. They understand that Courage Work emerges from the same deep stream as Kirkridge. They value the need of balancing our inner need for quiet and reflection with our call to be involved working for a more just and kind

world. The Fellows understand that this is a "courageous" solitary journey that, paradoxically, must be done in the companionship of others. Over several years this group has developed a deep trust in one another. Exciting ventures and partnerships are emerging. Ideas are being birthed for the "common good" that are based not in competition, but rather on a trust and deep appreciation for the gifts each has to offer to the world. Trust, appreciation and inclusion are radical concepts in our world that, when honored, allow for deep creativity and innovation.

Kirkridge and other retreat centers like it are committed to returning "order to the soul." Together we drop pebbles into the ocean of our shared lives as humanity and proclaim that valuing the good of the common has a critical place in our survival. Together we learn to honor the unique contributions of each person and encourage gifts of creativity and imagination to be our companions into a new day. Trusting in the gifts of each season of life, relying on the universal message of abundance in nature and the healing power of ancient mountains, our souls find rest and restoration in the midst of chaos. Dreaming dreams of inclusion and justice that carry us to the edge of what has never been done before can be accomplished with the courageous companionship of others.

Other exciting conversations are emerging across the Kirkridge family. As we approach our 75th anniversary, there are conversations emerging about interfaith programs that expand our spiritual connections to the world, questions about inclusion for adults with autism and intellectual disabilities, wonderments of how to ethically live in this world with diminished resources. We are asking what does it mean to live "non-violently today" and how do we support one another creatively pushing the edge of innovation and new ideas to serve the common good.

This weekend at Kirkridge brought a program on Thomas Merton and Peacemaking. Merton's words hold a sacred thread that speaks to what I experience as the director of Kirkridge. It is here that I feel a hidden wholeness in my life, work and community. Here is where I experience the threads that weave in directions I never expected or imagined and yet, have always been in plain view, valuing "the commons." My experience is shared with many others through decades on this mountain. Who can truly explain "the hidden wholeness" of life? It is for each of us a gift, to be discovered, shared and honored for in the end, it is a mystery only to be experienced and never to be claimed.

My camper heart found its home at Kirkridge. I can breathe here. As my feet touch the forest floor in every season, I am aware of the deep lessons offered by the natural world. Walking well-worn paths in the woods, I am reminded daily that I walk on lands where many have walked before. Here I have been held through the blizzards and droughts of my life. Over the years on this land, my theology has become more gentle and inclusive, as I am able to hold paradox.

Living on this ancient mountain, I have experienced valuable lessons about our common humanity. As I learned many years ago in scouting, I know that it is dangerous to wander too far alone in life. Over years I have found trustworthy companions who care passionately about the common world in which we live. I have met women and men who honor their need to live in balance honoring both their souls and the call to offer their gifts to the world.

I come back to Menzie's words: "***The word common originally meant 'together-as one,' 'shared alike' and 'bound together by obligation.' "*** With the community formed around Kirkridge, I have been deeply blessed to gain insight on what it means to be part of "common." Over the years, here on these ancient rocks, my camper heart has learned it is safe to lean awhile, journey with others, share my soul, honor my heart, and work for the common good of our world.

Dr. Jean M. Richardson, is the director of Kirkridge Retreat Center. She lives with her partner Pat and together they have 4 grown children and 2 not-so-grown Labrador retrievers. They live in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania at Kirkridge. Jean can be reached at jeanr@kirkridge.org or 610-588-1793.

Home is Here and Not Here

By Susan Nodurft

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

~ T.S. Eliot ~

The summer morning air is slightly cool, typically still, and pleasantly breathable in southern Mississippi. That pleasantness begins to fade as the humidity rises with the sun. Although an early riser by nature, it is now, as it was as a child, also by choice. I rise early to greet that morning freshness with anticipation. The child rose anticipating a day companioned with dog and imagination exploring the wildness surrounding our small farm. Today, from the perspective of seventy-five years, I rise anticipating a quieter exploration. Still companioned with dog and wonder, I rise to watch the sun rise and begin its slow progression southward into the day.

Of course, as the poet T.S. Eliot says so well, our exploring never ends, but what he is saying is every true exploration brings about a new seeing as if for the first time. My experience as a Kirkridge Fellow was that kind of exploration, one that brought about a new seeing of self and possibilities for sustaining our lives as facilitators and bringing this work into the world.

This is that story.

It is being told through the voice of someone who has called Courage Work home for over fifteen years. Through those years, this blessed work has time and again opened new paths for "unceasing" exploration. In varied and often unexpected ways, each played a role in forming and transforming this explorer. However, none has been more significant than my experience as a Kirkridge Fellow. What I know now, unimagined at the trailhead, is the depth of realization and transformation possible when traveling over time within a community of deeply committed seekers in communion with Place.

In the pages that follow, I share with you some of the features of this Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program (KCFP) with the hope that, even if you can't be a Fellow, you can take away some new possibilities for your own unceasing exploration. First some background...

Born free, as free as the wind blows
As free as the grass grows
Born free to follow your heart

-- "Born Free" lyrics by Don Black and John Barry

Born in Minnesota and transplanted in southern Mississippi in the 1940's, I have called that Place on the planet home for the majority of my seventy-five years. It is a place for which, in spite of its complicated and traumatic history, I have abiding affection. My dad, son of Swedish immigrants, was an agronomist by vocation. He inherited his ancestor's love of the land, and so, to my good fortune, did I. That love and growing up in the midst of wildness shaped my sense of the world. This world was experienced as whole, workable, and wise. Forever fascinating, it was a world in which exploration was irresistible. Wildness was home.

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

~ e.e.cummings ~

As with every child, my early years were the beginning of my learning the steps of the culture's dance of division. It began in school, moving in slow motion toward adulthood, and dancing the jig. All part of the exploring, but then there is always that call, that "thread" as William Stafford describes it in *The Way It Is:*

There is a thread you follow. It goes among the things that change.
But it doesn't change.

It was following this thread, perhaps unconsciously, that I felt my way into Courage Work and found myself standing at the door of the Kirkridge Fellowship program. The invitation to the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship Program (KCFP) for facilitators, a series

of five retreats held over a span of two years, came framed within the context of the Mobius journey. This was to be an opportunity to live more deeply into the "knowing" that we do our best work as facilitators when we "facilitate who we are." In thinking into the work ahead, we were asked to develop a Plan for Still Learning (PSL), a field guide of sorts; outlining and shaping our hopes for personal development, gaining insights to be shared with the larger collaboration in sustaining this work, and importantly, how this experience might inform our personal commitment for "going public." The guide and these intentions were swirling in my head as I created a somewhat sketchy vision of what I hoped might evolve through the series.

Making its creation a bit more difficult, however, was the fact that since retiring from teaching, I had been living a life more in the rhythm of an almanac than a field guide. But as a biologist, I appreciated the value of a good field guide. What I know about such guides is they can be indispensable roadmaps to life and land. They are wonderful to use, but not easy to create. Undertaking such a task requires both passion and an intimate "knowing" of subject and territory – who or what is there (and what is not), relationships, details of distinction, habits, sounds, quirks and on and on. People I know who do this work often possess an innate sense of curiosity, wonder, and notice things – they pay attention. And (I might add) love their subject! Having tried my hand at a few of these, the jewel in the work was a closeness, a sense of kinship one begins to feel with the beings and place, far beyond name and form. Of course, I always hoped to end up with a usable guide, but that jewel was in the process, not the product. This surely would be the hallmark in creating my PSL.

Kirkridge is located on the Kittatinny Ridge of eastern Pennsylvania near the Delaware Water Gap and the Pocono Mountains. It was built in 1942, a vision of the late John Oliver Nelson who drew inspiration from the Iona Community off the coast of Scotland. It houses three main meeting facilities (lodging and dining): at the base is the original Farmhouse; ascending the mountain, Turning Point is midway; at the peak stands Nelson Lodge. Each has its own aura and personality, and during the series we had the opportunity to gather in, and come to love, each. However, Kirkridge as Place is much more - deeply embedded in Soil and Spirit.

In its rich and storied history, Kirkridge has often been described as one of those "thin places" on the planet particularly welcoming to soul. If you've visited this mountain Place, you have experienced the magic and mystery embodied in its ancient rocks and the sacredness of its Celtic roots. My history with Kirkridge, prior to the Fellowship series, was short. I had only stepped foot on its sacred soil a time or two prior to the series. However, I brought with me a "knowing of" going back to the 1960's. It was "The Place" I knew Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit priest whose commitment to peace and justice I deeply admired, returned time and again to draw sustenance for his good work in the world. It was a place I was longing to know.

In preparing for the journey, my wish was to go light, paring things down to the essentials- curiosity, openness, and an intention to be awake. I hoped to hear what this mountain community might have to say about embracing more fully this stage of life. What were the guiding questions to be asked, to hold? The field guide had a title, but the pages were blank.

THE TRAILHEAD AND WALKING IN THE DARK

Inscribed on the trailhead marker was a quote by the American writer, Rebecca Solnit, *"Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That's where the most important things come, where you yourself came from, and where you will go."* It was an invitation to get lost. This was reinforced by Joyce Rupp's advice in *Old Maps No Longer Work* to toss old maps away...be pilgrims, walk deeper into the dark of our night, wait for the stars and trust their guidance. So we began, waiting for the stars to appear – the questions. The questions appeared in that night sky – questions of home. *What exactly IS home as we commonly reference the destination in our work? Is wholeness home? If so, what does it feel like, look like? What will I know about this place "for the first time" when I arrive?* It was in Clearness Committees that the light began to shine from these stars.

If you come to a fork in the road, take it.

~ Yogi Berra ~

Being a family of facilitators, familiarity with the clearness process could be an advantage or disadvantage, but as Yogi's fork in the road, this path is *both/and*, not *either/or*. Admittedly, it can be a slippery slope if a committee of facilitators gets too "relaxed" with the guidelines. However, if members are vigilant in up-holding the boundaries, it offers a unique opportunity to listen more deeply and gain fresh insights into how the teaching of clearness might be done more effectively in retreat facilitation as well as gaining personal clarity.

And having a community of skilled facilitators also provided an opportunity to try different approaches to traditional practices and evaluate their effectiveness. An example in this series was the convening of Clearness Triads composed of the same three individuals, meeting each day of retreat (total of three). I found participating in this novel experiment of clearness work to be powerful and insightful. In the first committee, issue explanation and inquiry began to attune the "focus" person to listening, and each successive gathering picked up at a new depth that enabled the focus person to go ever deeper. It almost goes without saying, being relieved of "re-explaining the issue" in following committees was a distinct advantage in allowing more time for inquiry. Another significant feature was a format alternating Circle sessions with committee gatherings. Clearness deepened sessions, and sessions deepened clearness.

The result was a retreat space that held a hub of silence at its center.

I am reminded of Elie Wiesel's response to the question, "*Why do you pray?*" posed by his spiritual teacher, Moshe, during their concentration camp ordeal. His answer was simply, *"I don't know why."* Wiesel goes on to say, in his book *Night*, that after that day, Moshe explained to him with great insistence that every question possessed a power that did not lie in the answer. I found this patient, consistent, alternating processes of "question holding" created space for accessing that kind of power. There were questions I held through a single retreat and those held through the entire series. This experience gave me much to think about as I construct future retreats and approaches to teaching the process more effectively. As an example, I share a learning...

Having participated in many committees through the years, I noticed in myself as a focus person, and as a committee member, that if each question was *always* held in silence before a response was given, it was more likely the voice speaking would be that of the soul. In teaching clearness we emphasize the importance of holding spaces for silence in the circle, some even holding its place with an extra chair. However, more importantly, is the holding of each question in silence within. The mind, of course, is always first in line, eager to field the question and share its thinking (old and known), but we've covered that ground before. If we wait in the dark unknown allowing time for the question to drop into the heart, the wisdom voice of the shy soul may speak the new into our lives.

I share this example of sitting in committee as a focus person over eight years ago exploring the question of retiring. I received these questions: "If retirement was a door I was passing through, what does the door look like? And, if opened and stood in the foyer, what would I see?" Holding that question in silence and waiting resulted in an image of a very specific type of door, and upon opening, a scene that changed the trajectory of my life. I have revisited those questions many times, and they continue to "open doors" of possibility. All this is not to say that the mind has nothing to offer; there is value in its efforts, but clearness offers so much more – the opportunity to unleash that power Moshe speaks of, the power that lies beyond the answer if only we sit quietly under the tree.

Rumi the poet was a scholar also.
But Shams, his friend, was an angel.
By which I don't mean anything patient or sweet.
When I read how he took Rumi's books and threw them
into the duck pond,
I shouted for joy. Time to live now,
Shams meant.
I see him, turning away
casually toward the road, Rumi following, the books
floating and sinking among the screeching ducks,
oh, beautiful book-eating pond!

~ Mary Oliver, *The Return* ~

This is professional development of a different kind! It is the kind of development we engage in each and every time we participate in a Circle facilitated by a Courage colleague. We are always participant-observers, continually learning from one another. In such a gathering as the Kirkridge Fellows, in which gifted facilitators led our Circle, this was professional development at its best. Yet, there is more and speaks to the important role of retreat design in creating powerful spaces for accessing our deep inner resources.

One can hear Mary Oliver's delight in *The Return* (in her book *What Do We Know?)* at Shams' dramatic act of throwing poor Rumi's books in the duck-pond. I can only imagine how I would feel if Shams dispatched my books. Aghast comes close. But I, too, can delight in his wisdom and message, *Time to live now* – learning IS life, a live encounter. It can't be lived in the head. Shams, the mystic, understood there comes a time when the books must be put away and we walk into the dark, engaged and awake, watchful and reflective. In the design of this retreat series, there was a weaving of *head or book space* (thinking and imagination) with *live encounter* (interactive and experiential) with *reflection* (clearness committee) that powerfully invited the voice of soul.

As an illustration of this interactive design, I share a description from our first retreat, while holding the questions of "home":

- **The Head: A Book**
  I'm one of those fortunate beings who wholeheartedly embraces the notion emblazoned on the plaque sitting on my computer desk, "*Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.*" So it is not surprising one of the provisions I carried for our first retreat was John Muir's small book, *Stickeen.* Stickeen was a scrawny, black, worthless-looking dog, as Muir described him, who was a stowaway of sorts on a trip he made in the 1880's to explore the glaciers of southeastern Alaska. Stickeen had been so named because of his enthusiastic adoption by the Stickeen Indians as a good luck totem. As Muir tells it, this little dog was destined to share (and survive) one of the most perilous nights of either of their lives. Their story was animating my imagination, as I sat in Circle contemplating my questions about home. Was my sense of "home" related to curiosity, living wholeheartedly this adventure of life? Was it about risk-taking or staying attuned to the world around me, responding without thought? Muir and Stickeen, as Shams would recognize, *lived now.* Not surprisingly, after spending a storm-battling night traversing crevasse-laden glaciers, there existed a bond between the two, not of words, but of knowing. From that time forward, Muir wrote, the little dog stayed close to his side and often would catch his eye, as if to say, "*Wasn't that an awful time we had together on the glacier?"* Their story stirred my imagination with thoughts of home – curiosity, being "at home" as they say, in their own skin, literally walking into the dark unknown, and bonds of connection. These impressions stayed with me in an experience the following day.

- **Live Encounter: An Experience**
  The next morning we meandered from the Farmhouse a short distance up the mountain to a small glass fusion art studio known as the TIP Glass Studio. TIP - *Together It's Possible* - is an initiative of the Kirkridge Retreat Center. It is composed of a group of families working toward new possibilities for cognitively-challenged young adults in the area. Along with educating parents and providing support for families, the group advocates for change in old thinking about people with intellectual disabilities. Day-to-day they provide opportunities for recreation, work experience, and social engagement. If the walls could speak in that small studio, they would say love happens here.

  Once settled in the studio, a relaxed excitement was in the air as we anticipated the invitation to create our own "glass fusion" art. In the center of the room were several large tables with small baskets containing various colored glass chips and rods. Next to two walls were displays of glass pendants and nightlights created by members of the TIP family. Each was beautiful, unique, inspiring, and a wonderful model as we envisioned our work. This placing of a hands-on experience (one of many in the retreats) created a new spaciousness in which the head lets go into the hands, a spaciousness welcoming to the voice of soul. Ever the participant-observer, we simply notice - what shape/s do the hands choose, the colors, the pattern being formed? I chose a dark green rectangular glass piece for the base of a pendant. Then – two thin red rods placed at angles on the corners much like furniture rounds off corners of a room. An orange rod down the center with two small beads, one red, one orange, placed in the center on either side of the orange rod like bright eyes looking out at me. In time with this tangible work of my hands, in my hands, I will explore questions of home: what the colors, the arrangement, the bright eyes may say? But for now, those meanings were to be held in the spacious gift of time.

- **Reflective Exploration: Clearness**
  In Clearness Triad, holding each thoughtful question from my committee partners in silence, I listened for clues of home. I began by following Muir and Stickeen who had a sense of the direction toward home. There were many more companions on this exploratory journey; adding to hints from the pendant's teachings were my childhood love of wildness, life experiences, and everything and everyone that was "my" world in the moment – my courage community, the mountain's dynamic wildness, the love and labor that is the life of TIP – nothing was excluded from the conversation. It was just the beginning of a journey, and it was, as the saying goes, going to be a trip.

And so it went, weaving of life and learning, giving and receiving within a rich community of gifted facilitators. The container of topics was varied and vast – social justice, understanding personality and shadow, music, shadows of money, poetry, bearing witness, wildness, and our proper Place within the family of things (to name a few). All unfolded as professional development of the transformative kind.

Wasn't that an awful time we had together on the glacier?

~John Muir's projection of Stickeen's thoughts ~

Deep and abiding friendships formed during our time together in retreat over the two years. Those relationships sustained us then and will certainly continue to sustain our lives and work well into the future. From this time forward, when we catch one another's eye, in the same wordless way of Stickeen, we will be saying, *"Wasn't that an incredible time we had together on the mountain at Kirkridge?"*

The bond will forever be. Anyone who has participated in Courage Work knows the gifts of "inner knowing" possible in a Circle of Trust. These gifts are available whether a single stand-alone retreat or a series. But beyond doubt, a series over time (usually a year or two) offers so much more. There is not only a greater opportunity to discover "true self," but to actually experience the power and possibilities of a **Community** of Trust. The greatest of my insights of "home" did not come from exploring questions, but from the *lived experience* of being a Fellow. It is the live encounter – the whole of it. This has much to say about how we might sustain this work.

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

~ John Muir ~

If you sense this "hitching," then you too have felt the tugs and ripples in the vast network of universal connections. For most of us, it has been the tugs that changed us, sending ripples through our lives and beyond. The gathering of Kirkridge Fellows was a tug. For many, it was the first time since facilitator preparation there had been an opportunity to participate in a Courage series simply as participants (rather than facilitator-participants) and "do our work." As a facilitator working in a more remote part of country, the Fellowship was a gift I had long "longed for." As soon as the call went out, without hesitation, I answered. As it turns out, this longing was echoed throughout our gathered community. From retreat to retreat, as friendships and trust deepened, understanding of self and work became clearer. We came to understand what we had been missing – a sense of real connection to the courage community.

Marge Piercy in *The Seven of Pentacles* encourages us to "***Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.***" Real connections come from real encounters in real time - a Place where transparency, vulnerability and realness can be practiced

– a house that trust builds. If we want to sustain this work, offering more retreat opportunities for facilitators to "live community together" is the greatest support we can provide. It is our foundation, joy and hope as we strive to bring this good work into the world.

At the 2015 Center for Courage & Renewal Global Gathering, I both experienced and observed the energy of the Fellows rippling through the larger collaboration. There was a more palpable sense of connection to the whole, more reaching out and more sharing of gifts. Enlivening the part had enlivened the whole. The tug had pulled us closer as Fellows while pulling us closer to the collaboration of facilitators and our common work. It was hitching made visible.

> ***Reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.***
> ***This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,***
> ***for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting,***
> ***after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.***
>
> **~ Marge Piercy, *The Seven of Pentacles* ~**

Stepping off the trail, I reflected on what had come from this exploration of "home" – this journey of reaching out, bringing in, planting and tending…

It may be my Scandinavian heritage and the farming blood running through my veins that I first staked my claim of home in soil and family. On *this* soil and to *these* people, I belonged. The roots ran deep. It was my Place of belonging in which I never felt "home alone." I was born connected to universal net (not to be confused with electronic). My solitary childhood wanderings were well populated by life around me and imaginings within; other was a paradox, both me and not me. Although my early years spent in wildness could best be described as parallel play, wildness held teaching of home. Seeds of a knowing were blowing through the needles of those long leaf pines - home is here, and not here.

Since then, I have called many places "home," but questions rooted in the pines lingered. Reflecting on my life, I realize I have been seeking the answer to this question, in one form or another, most of my life – in relationships and vocations of choice. It was in communion with the people, the mountain, and spirit of this thin place that I was prompted to ask this question again.

I love that John Muir and Stickeen were companions on this journey looking expectantly with me for what exploration might be waiting around the bend. I, too, wanted to live as they lived, one foot (or two) among the domesticated, and the other(s) in the wild.

The story's end is almost too simple… Perhaps the kind of simplicity Eliot must have

known when he wrote "*to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*" By tucking the question away in a backpack and living the adventure, home reveals itself everywhere… In the beauty of the mountain and the faces of the Fellows and Kirkridge family who welcomed us with a hospitality that said "we're glad you're here." From the rocks and the rooted to the walking and the winged, all said **home**. It's simply seeing with new eyes right where we're planted. Living among the wildness of Kirkridge was not unlike living among wildness on the childhood farm – same wind, same voice, same words, "home is here and not here."

Home is in the beauty of everywhere and we're it.

Home is where the heart is. The harvest had come.

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BOOK CLOSING

Arriving Where We Started

We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

----- T. S. Eliot

Twenty-five years ago I was invited by a casual acquaintance to attend a women's book group. Not being generally attracted to such gatherings, I went with a touch of hesitation. I was a newcomer into a group that clearly had been meeting over an extended period of time. I felt out of place and awkward. The only thing that prepared me for the evening was that I had read the assigned book. As it turned out, the book never entered the conversation and I spent the evening feeling like an out-of-place eavesdropper. On the drive home I thought about the university professor I met named Sally. She was a quiet observer like me and I felt drawn to her. I wondered how I would approach or manage getting to know her. There seemed no point of intersection besides the book club, and the book club was not going to become part of my life.

I don't remember the timing, but I invited her to have lunch. Then she invited me to work with some teens in a leadership development program at the university. She invited me to a retreat with Parker J. Palmer. I invited her to serve as adjunct faculty on my doctoral committee. She invited me to serve as "scribe" for her two-year pilot program, *The Courage to Teach,* grounded in Parker's writing and funded by the Fetzer Institute. Today, many years later, our lives are deeply entwined in ways I would never have imagined. We accepted one another's invitations and the intersections began weaving themselves into a brilliant tapestry.

I approached the position of "scribe" as a job that would fulfill a graduate school requirement for an Internship, but from the moment I arrived at the first retreat for 24 public school educators, I knew I was in rare company. Sally filled our circle with artifacts, books, flowers, poetry and gently binding silence. When group members spoke I wrote as fast as possible to capture the essence of our time together. Poetry invited group members into conversation with themselves, and if they wished, into the

center of the circle. People were real. There were tears. There was no chit chatting. We were instructed not to "fix" one another, but rather to learn to listen deeply. I cried as I transcribed the notes I had scribbled after each three-day retreat because it wasn't until I was home that I really heard with the ear that is at the center of my heart what was being said.

Eight three-day retreats over a two-year period is a significant period of time to share with people who have been skillfully invited to go deeply inside of themselves and hear their inner teachers. Not to mention the fact that we met in places that were beautiful, places that invited us into nature. We laughed and cried together. We ate great food. We sang and danced and learned to see one another with soft eyes. We revealed ourselves to one another and to ourselves. We were carefully and capably held. Truly, it was a life-changing experience. One I never expected to experience—ever in my life.

One of the questions we were always holding for ourselves was how could we take these ways of being back out into the world which is typically not as safe a place to be real. As time progressed each of us felt ourselves becoming stronger in our convictions to live with integrity, and the question began to lose its urgency. At the end of two years I know I was profoundly and forever changed by the experience. And since our original group convened last spring for a 20-year reunion, I think it is safe to say that we were all deeply moved by our time and experience together. We stepped back into our circle as if twenty years had not passed.

Because I was so moved by my experience in that two-year Courage to Teach retreat series, I applied and was accepted into the first cohort of facilitators being prepared to take Courage Work further out into the world. The Center for Courage & Renewal's first cohort of facilitators in 1998 was also generously funded by The Fetzer Institute.

I arrived at facilitator preparation with three specific questions that seemed to me to be crucial to the successful implementation of future programs. I knew that Fetzer was not going to be funding this Work in the future (they often planted and nurtured seeds for new work in the world), so I had questions about how to raise funds, and how the Center would be involved with supporting facilitators in those efforts. My questions were not answered in the way I hoped, and I left facilitator preparation without a strong concept for how to fund future programs. Between 1999 and 2014 I facilitated very

little, but I regularly attended Circles of Trust to keep myself close to the work that meant so much to me. As the Center grew and evolved, and the number of facilitators grew worldwide, and the format for retreats branched into many other forms, funding remained a daunting question for me. I began asking other facilitators about their experience and learned that lack of funding was an impediment.

When Sally conceived of a Fellowship for facilitators, I raced toward the opportunity to work with and surround myself with other facilitators. The invitation to take my inner work deeper spurred me to stop asking questions about fundraising and to come up with some answers. I researched and wrote a fundraising guide expressly for Courage & Renewal facilitators called *Navigating the Mobius Strip of Money* in order to empower them and myself. When I tested my ideas within the Fellowship, people told me their perceptions shifted. Fellows told me they think and act differently about money issues and cultivating support for their work.

My experience of being in a second two-year retreat series, this time with other CCR facilitators, has been a second life-changing experience I never expected. Ending the isolation I felt for most of my time as a facilitator has had a catalytic effect. It took some time and a fair portion of patience, but my questions have found answers. I have arrived where I started, and I have been transformed in the process.

This book tells part of each participant's story: how the invitation to "take our work deeper" has translated through each of us. But this book does not tell the story of how this invitational Fellowship has invigorated and catalyzed each of us as facilitators. Multiple new retreats and series have grown out of this Fellowship, this amazing thin place that is both the Place that is Kirkridge and the power that is community. People who have never worked together before are combining their skills and interests. We have intuitively developed a self-regulatory system that improves who we are individually and how we work collectively.

I echo Sally's hope from the Book Opening: We hope you'll find some of your own story in our stories, that you will find portals to your own thin places.

Megan LeBoutillier
February, 2017

AFTER WORDS of INVITATION and APPRECIATION

As we come to the end of gathering the stories for this book, we are overflowing with gratitude for the Kirkridge Courage Fellows for daring to go where no woman or man has gone before – and for taking us with you. That includes each writer in the book – AND Donna Bivens and Kathy Gille and Dan Hines and Fred Monteith.

And we have gratitude for you, dear Reader, and some invitations... We would welcome you into an email exchange or a phone conversation – AND into a retreat. We are creating Circles of Trust going deeper in thin places and in the ideas we've shared in our book, hoping you might find them portals to your own thin place. Come walk with us at this very special thin place that is Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center. Join us for a Circle of Trust – and/or invite us to your neck of the woods. You have our contact information at the end of each story –or you can go to the Kirkridge webpage or www.stilllearning.org.

To Kirkridge, we share our gratitude for your radical hospitality – and your stewardship of this thin place that made it all possible. Janet and Rob and Stacey and Gail and Jean and Pat and Peter and Alek. TIP and Judy and Jeff and the Glass Studio. Happy 75th Anniversary. (Reader, go visit them at www.kirkridge.org)

We thank Sara Sanders and Joe Sullivan and John Fenner and Terry Chadsey and Fisher! and Tantawan and Denise and the faces in the trees, for your willingness to be our Third Things and to enrich our experience. Jonetta Moyo, your beautiful handcrafted journals and your loving care have been an integral part of this journey. Reader, meet Jonetta at http://myinspirationstudio.com/

We have deep appreciation for the many poets and authors and seekers we have quoted in our stories and who have enhanced our journey. (We intentionally made the decision to forego footnotes and bibliographies and to gently embed their names and the sources within our stories. Knowing how deformed we have been by academic writing—and realizing that today's technology has changed our understanding of access to information, we debated whether to use APA or MLA style or some other – and decided instead to create our own! Each writer has shared her or his email or

website in the hope that you will reach out with any questions or comments.)

Words feel inadequate to thank Jim (Sally's husband and forever-love) and Bruce (Megan's husband and traveling partner on this journey of Life) for always being there, for support and encouragement and design skills and honest words and, most of all, for love.

And we thank each other... For saying yes... For always trusting that together, we could be more than either of us could be alone.

With love and courage,
Sally and Megan

THE NAMING OF THINGS
BECAUSE WORDS MATTER

glos·sa·ry: a collection of textual glosses or of specialized terms with their meanings (**gloss:** a surface luster or brightness: shine)

---Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014

Naming things is a political act, an act of power. So we are naming the things that are important to us – and sharing with you, our Reader, what we mean with the words we use. Words matter, and we want to be inclusive in our language.

We refuse to give up words that are important to us because Others demean them or misuse them or label them as jargon. Instead we are claiming them here. As you read the stories in our book, we hope you'll visit this glossary again and again; bathe in our names for things, delighting with us in knowing what we mean, and seeing the gloss of our words, the shine, the luster.

Birthright Gifts:

We come into this world as unique individuals, each with our own **birthright gifts**. They are hard for us to see, because they have always been there. Often if something comes easily for us, such as the gift to see with an artist's eye or the gift to remember poetry or the gift to see how to arrange a room with beauty, we devalue it. **Birthright gifts** are evident from the moment of birth; we only have to pay attention to an infant to understand that. Babies do not show up as raw material to be shaped by their environment and culture; they come fully formed, with the seed of true self. Yes, we are born with identity and integrity, and even as young children, we know what we like and dislike, what we are drawn towards and what we feel resistance to, what makes us feel alive and what drains our energy. But over the next decade or two, as we move through adolescence and schooling, we too often become **deformed**. We spend the first half of our lives abandoning our **birthright gifts**, Parker Palmer writes in *Let Your Life Speak*, or letting others disabuse us of them. The purpose of education, at its best, is to create the space for each of us to recognize and deepen our unique **birthright gifts**, to honor them and learn to use them in fulfilling our life's purpose.

Boundary Markers, Touchstones:

These are the covenants by which members of a Circle of Trust agree to accept shared responsibility for holding safe and trustworthy space. The Stepping Stone in Section 1 gives the version of the Boundary Markers used by the Kirkridge Courage Fellows. Another version may be found at http://www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones.

Chronos:
Ancient Greek word describing the marking of days and hours. See *Kairos.*

Circle of Trust®, circle of trust: The **Circle of Trust®** (capital C, capital T)is a registered trademark of the Center for Courage & Renewal, and the programs can only be offered by facilitators prepared by the Center. For a bit more of an explanation, see Parker's insight in Section 3, or go to the Center's webpage (www.couragerenewal.org). Perhaps even more important, a **circle of trust** (lower case c and t) could be two people or ten or twenty, who create a safe space for the soul to show up. Although you will find other meanings for a **circle of trust** if you search the Web, the best place to understand the phrase as it we use in this book is in Parker's writing, especially *A Hidden Wholeness.*

Clearness Committee, Clearness Triads:
The **Clearness Committee** has been adapted for the Circle of Trust program from the Quaker tradition. It is a focused microcosm of a larger circle of trust, a safe and trustworthy space, where we have an intense experience of gathering in support of someone's inner journey. In the Kirkridge Courage Fellowship, we often used an adaptation we called Clearness Triads. For a bit more of an explanation, see the Stepping Stone in Section 2.

Confidentiality, Deep or Double Confidentiality:

Most of us know the concept of confidentiality, of not sharing anything that is said in a particular setting with anyone outside of those present. **Deep or double confidentiality** is used in the context of the Clearness Committee/Clearness Triads, meaning that committee members would not only never speak to each other or anyone else about the issue when the Committee ended, but they also would not speak with the focus person about the problem unless she or he requested the conversation.

Courage:
From the Latin, *cor,* heart. Courage does not mean that we have no fear, but that we don't act out of that fear. See **heart.**

Courage Work, Courage and Renewal:
An affectionate way of talking about the various forms of Courage to Teach, Courage to Lead, Circles of Trust, and other work, grounded in the writing of Parker J. Palmer, offered by facilitators prepared by the Center for Courage & Renewal.

Hearing into Speech:
This wonderful way to describe a sacred deep listening that honors silence is credited to theologian Nelle Morton from her experiences in the early 1970's. She writes in *The Journey Is Home*, "If one can be heard to one's own speech, then the speech would be a new speech and the new speech would be a new experience in the life of the speaker – that is, the one heard to speech." She describes this kind of deep listening

as "a depth hearing that takes place before speaking – a hearing that is more than acute listening. A hearing that is a direct transitive verb that evokes speech – new speech that has never been spoken before."

Heart:
The heart is important in our Courage Work, as it is literally where courage begins. The word courage comes from the Latin word for heart, ***cor***. So we are reclaiming the word **heart** from its too-often sentimental use in our culture, to "the core of the self," as Parker writes in *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, " that center place where all our ways.,, of knowing converge – intellectual, emotional, sensory, intuitive, imaginative, experiential, relational, and bodily, among others. The heart is where we integrate what we know in our minds with what we know in our bones, the place where our knowledge can become more fully human."

Hidden Wholeness:
"*There is in all things...a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity, and Integrity, is Wisdom, the Mother of all,"* writes Thomas Merton in Hagia Sophia. *"This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as my sister Wisdom. I am awakened at the voice of my Sister."* Courage Work invites individuals who want to live an undivided life into a Circle of Trust, creating a safe space for the soul to show up, to make that hidden wholeness a bit more visible, to awaken to that inner voice.

Identity and Integrity:
These two words are at the root of Courage Work, as we talk about creating space where participants can name and claim and nurture their identity and integrity. We share here Parker's beautiful explanation in *The Courage to Teach*: " By ***identity*** *I* mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others, and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, **identity** is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. By ***integrity*** I mean whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life. **Integrity** requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not—and that I choose life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me: do I welcome them or fear them, embrace them or reject them, move with them or against them? By choosing **integrity**, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am."

Inner Teacher:
The voice of the authentic Self in each of us. Thomas Merton calls it Wisdom (see Hidden Wholeness above). Sandie Merriam also goes into more detail in her story in Section 1.

Kairos, Kairos Moment:
An ancient Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment. The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* refers to chronological or sequential time; *kairos* signifies a period or a season, that particular moment in time in which an event of significance happens.

Listening, Deep Listening:
The theologian Paul Tillich said the first duty of love is to listen. A kindergartener named Alec carefully explained to me that the words **listen** and **silent** have the same letters – just in a different order – and you can't do one without the other. Both listening and silence are essential elements of a Circle of Trust, and that is where deep listening comes in. Deep listening requires the listener to be fully present, with no necessity to respond or to fix. The purpose is to create the space for the speaker to hear his or her own inner truth. Deep listening may include open, honest questions, which are explained below. A result of deep listening is often feeling heard into speech, as explained above.

Mobius, Mobius Strip, Mobius journey:
The dictionary tells us that the Mobius strip, named for the German mathematician A. F. Mobius, is a one-sided surface made by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through 180 degrees. Parker Palmer talks about the stages of growing into who we are, of developing our birthright gifts, as growing towards "life on the Mobius strip," a seamless flow of our inner life and our outer world. We often talk about our journey to the undivided life as a Mobius journey, a kind-of thin place where inner and outer feel seamless.

Movement Model:
See the Insight from Parker Palmer in Section 1 on the Movement Way.

Paradox:
The ability to understand paradox, to hold two seemingly opposite truths, to embrace both/and rather than either/or, is another important element of the journey toward the undivided life. As the scientist Niels Bohr said, "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

Questions; Open, Honest Questions:

We have found that questions offer us a much more fertile ground for this journey to living undivided than do answers. The words that Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to a young poet in 1903 still serve as important touchstones for us: "...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now because you would not be able to live them. And, the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." Honest, open questions have become a practice in our Circles of Trust, one that we learned in the Clearness Committee. Parker defines and teaches the asking of honest, open questions in *A Hidden Wholeness*. He writes that an honest question is one to which the asker cannot possibly know the answer. An open question is one that expands rather than restricts your area of exploration, one that does not push or even nudge towards a particular way of seeing or responding.

Soft Eyes:

The idea of soft eyes often feels countercultural in a world that emphasizes sharp focus. In our Circles of Trust, we have come to understand that soft eyes are another important practice in the journey toward the undivided life. We encourage participants to see not only each other with soft eyes, but especially, to see themselves that way. Sally often explains soft eyes by sharing a story from her Kellogg fellowship in Bali: "When I asked the Balinese elder who was my mentor while I was there to help me understand the Balinese childrearing practices that result in gentle, compassionate young people, she explained to me that they saw their children with soft eyes. The Balinese consider their children holy. The younger a person is, the closer her soul to heaven and the purer her spirit. Babies have just come from God, so they are not permitted to touch the impure earth before their first birthday and are carried everywhere. Balinese children are never left alone, nor are they ever physically punished, and rarely are they upset. So, this wise woman told me, we see them with soft eyes, like you would see someone you love... It's not that you don't see the imperfections; you just don't see their sharp edges."

Soul:

"Nobody knows what the soul is," says poet Mary Oliver in her poem *Maybe*: "it comes and goes/ like the wind over the water." The soul has many names (Thomas Merton calls it true self; the Buddhists, original nature; Quakers, the inner light; Hasidic Jews, the spark of the divine; humanist, identity and integrity)– and Parker writes in *A Hidden Wholeness* that it doesn't matter *what* we name it, but *that* we name it matters a great

deal. We have come to know in our Circles of Trust that the soul is shy, making the creation of safe space very important if we are going to have a chance to hear that inner voice.

Thin Places:
Thin places are the way we are naming the space where we have the best chance of nurturing the courage to seek the undivided life we want to live. In a thin place, we see our connectedness to everything around us. For a bit more, see the Book Opening on Page 1.

Third Things:
Another important practice in our Circles of Trust is the use of third things so that we don't scare that shy soul away by approaching it too directly. To achieve that indirectionality we approach topics and themes in our Circles metaphorically, by using a poem or music or art or quote or object that embodies it. Parker names these embodiments as third things – and again, we send you to A *Hidden Wholeness*, if you want more details!

Touchstones:
See boundary markers. Also see Caryl Creswell's story in Section 3 and the Stepping Stone in that Section.

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Tragic Gap:
Parker writes in *A Hidden Wholeness* that "violence of every shape and form has its roots in the divided life." He offers the insight that the heart of nonviolence requires that we acknowledge that we live in a tragic gap – a gap between the way things are and the way we know they might be. In our Circles of Trust, as we learn to embrace paradox, we also learn the practices that allow us to stand faithfully in that tragic gap, holding the tension between reality and possibility.

Ubuntu:
This Nguni Bantu word literally means human-ness and is often translated as "humanity towards others." Since Nelson Mandela's presidency in South Africa, the term has spread from that region to other places, often through the writing of Desmond Tutu, who uses it to express the philosophical belief that we are all connected. In our Circles of Trust, as we come to understand the paradox that the inner journey can only be undertaken by an individual, and yet it is too hard to take alone, Tutu's writing on Ubuntu helps us find language for this seemingly countercultural concept, another way to name the idea of solitude in community.

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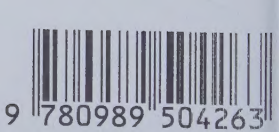

THIN PLACES

SEEKING THE COURAGE TO LIVE IN A DIVIDED WORLD

Thin places are mystical. They are holy. And they are real.

Thin places name the spaces that offer us the best chance of finding the courage to live in a divided world. As facilitators of Circles of Trust® the writers have grown to understand that thin places are best found in nature AND are created with careful attention and intention to safe and trustworthy space. They share their stories with the hope that you'll find some pieces of your own story, that you will discover portals to your own thin places.

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ISBN 978-0-
9 780989 504263
327-BAA-988

Prose Press
Pawleys Island SC
prosencons@live.com